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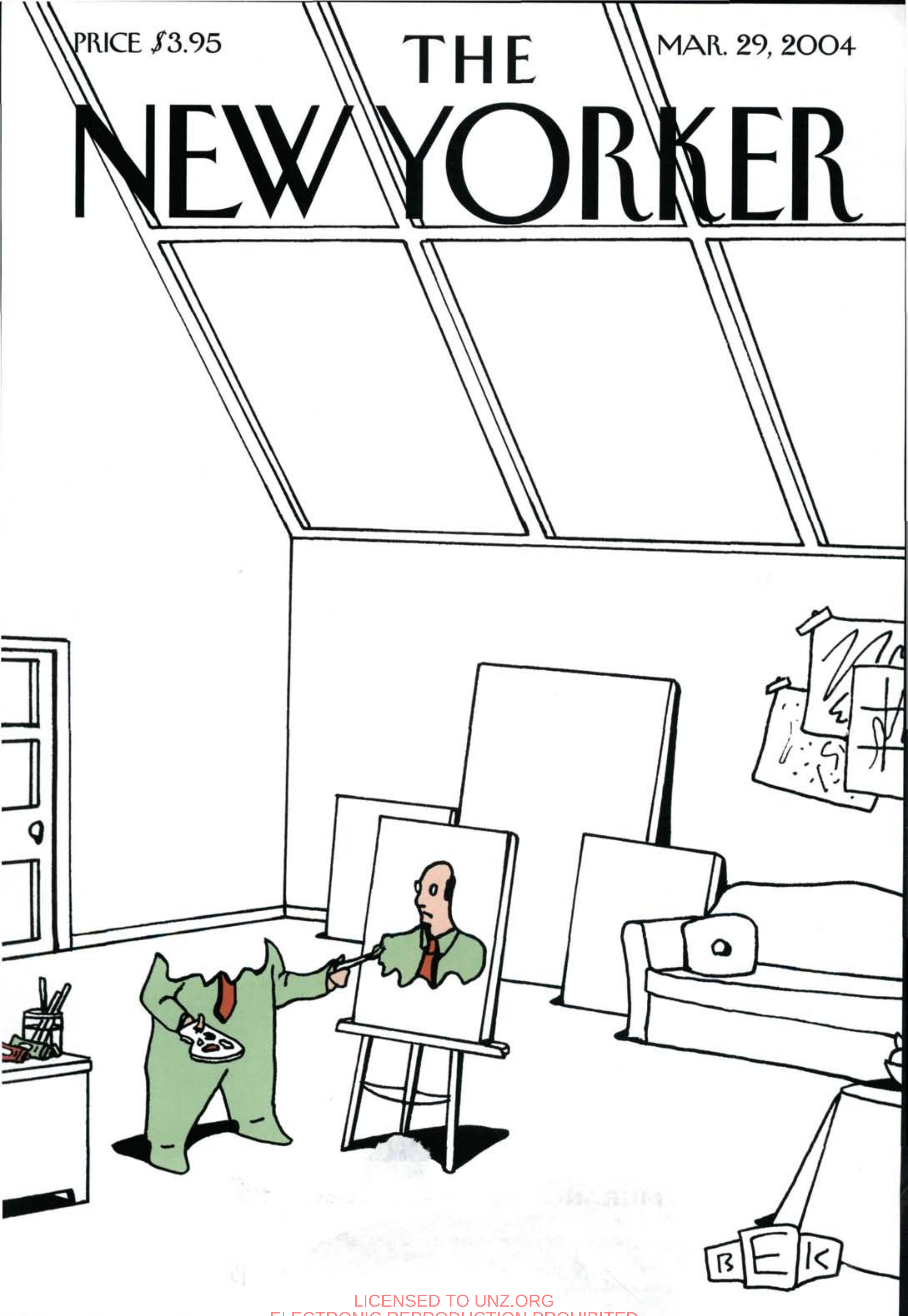

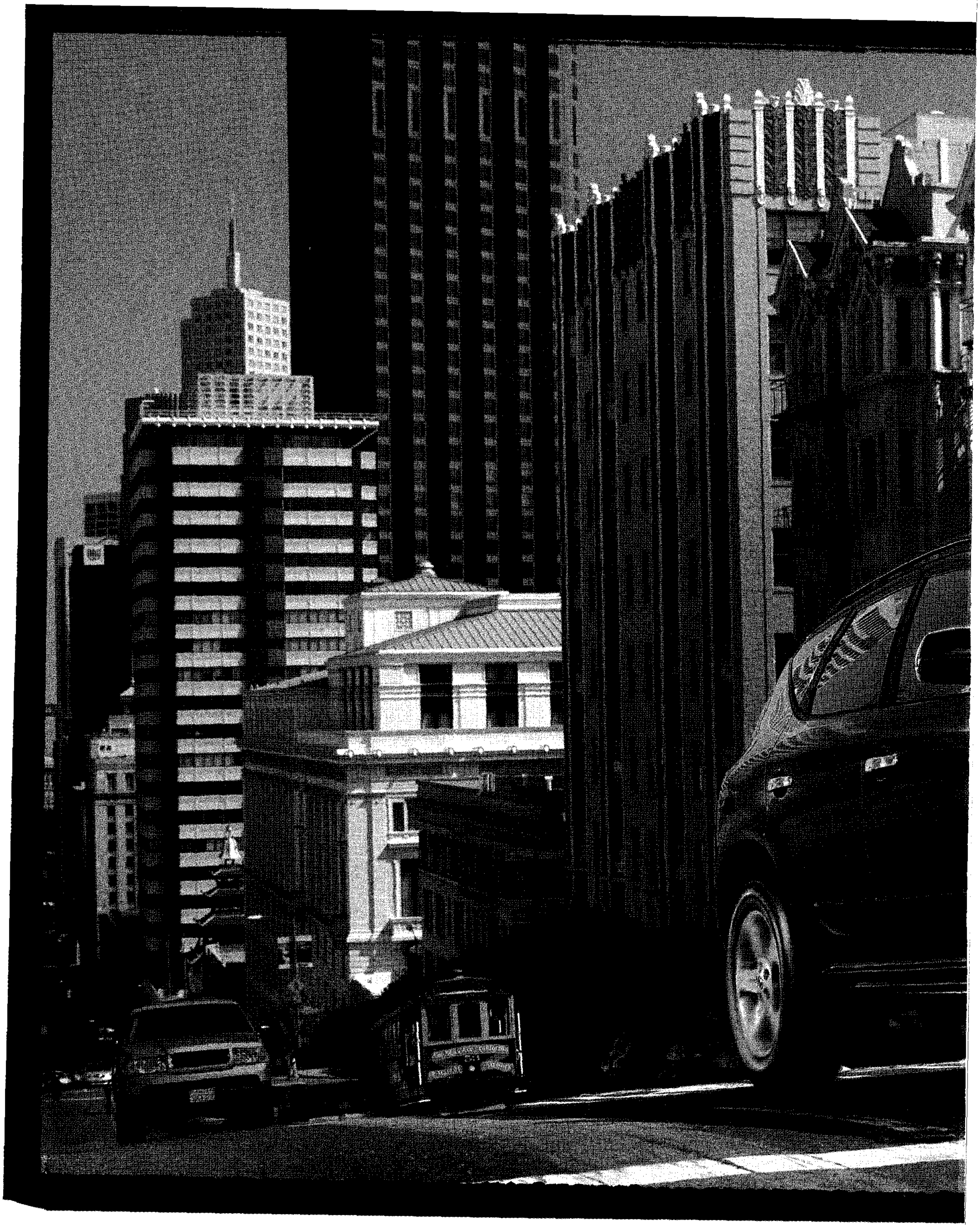

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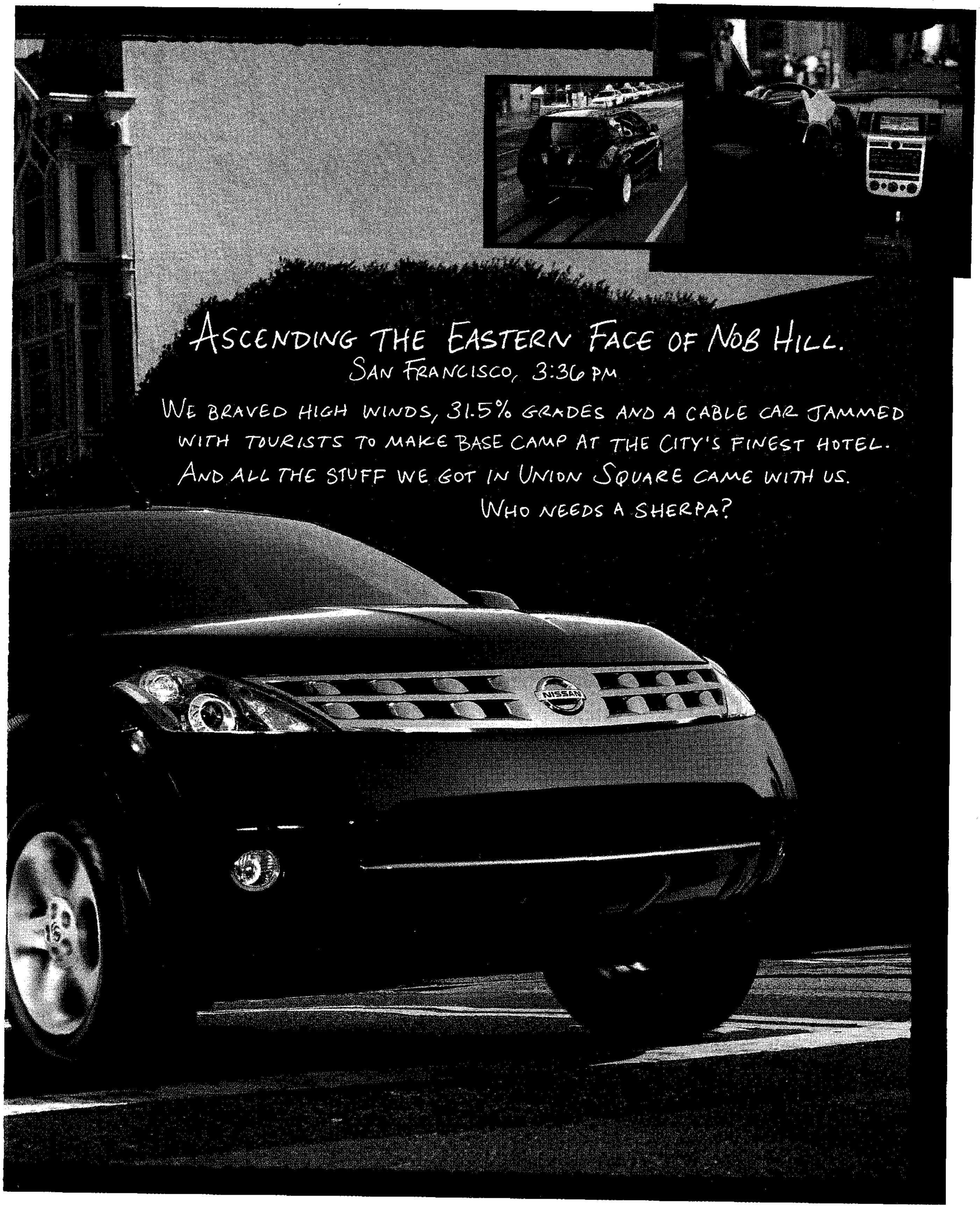

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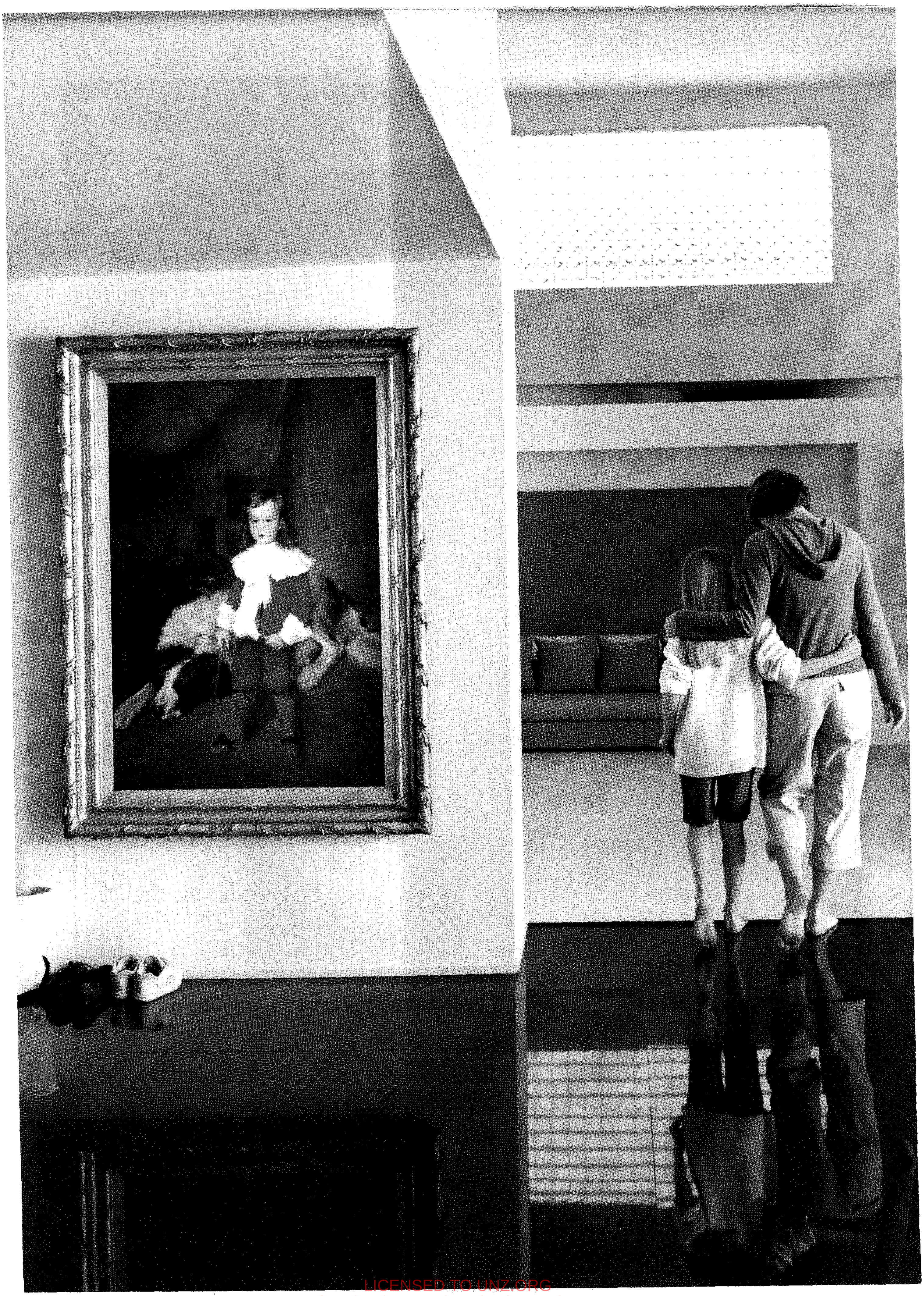

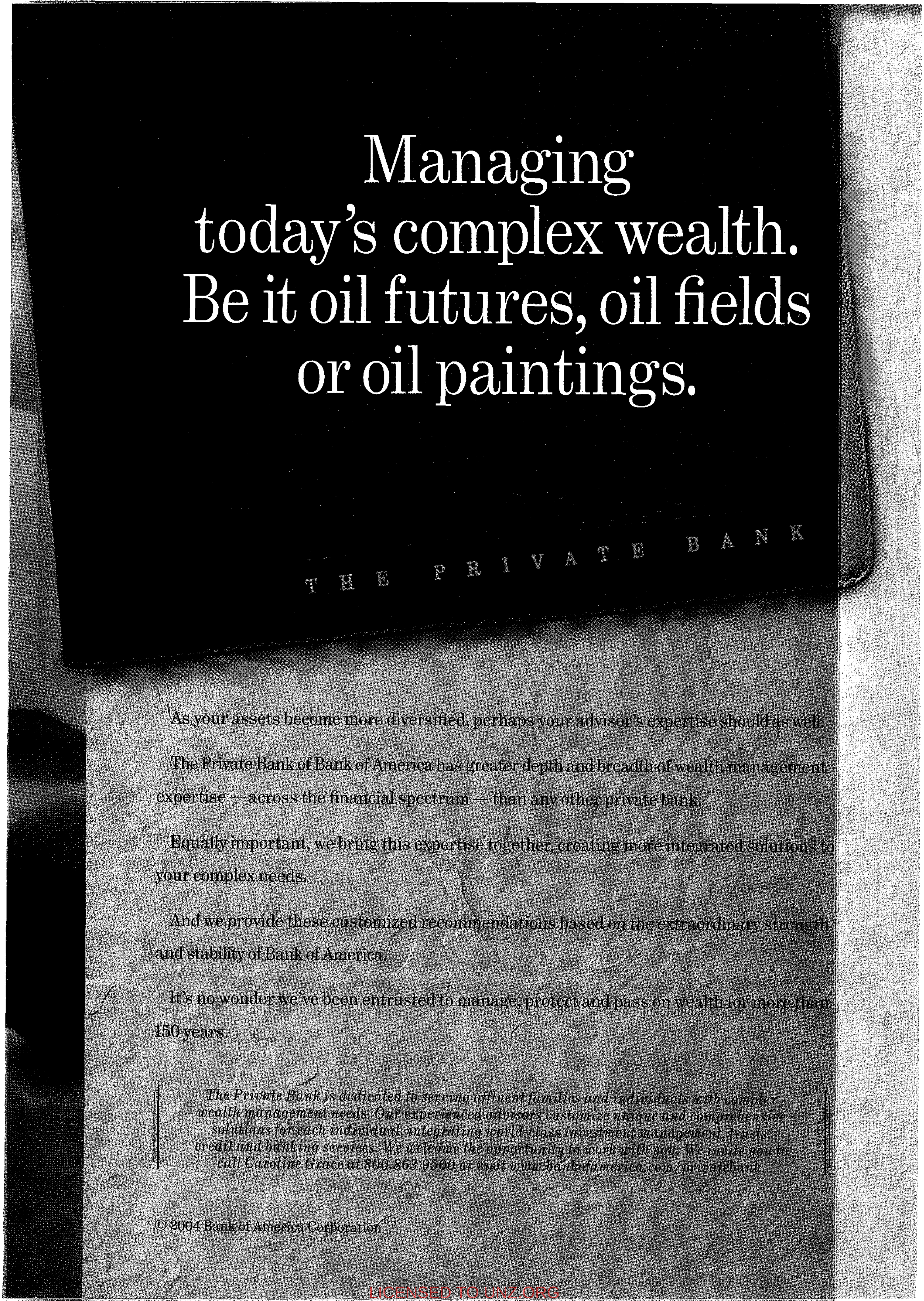

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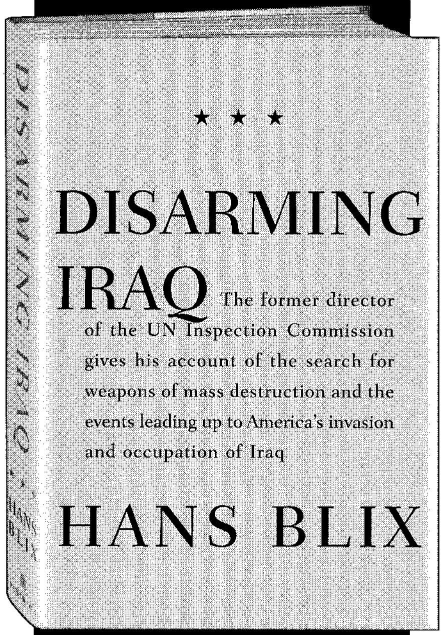
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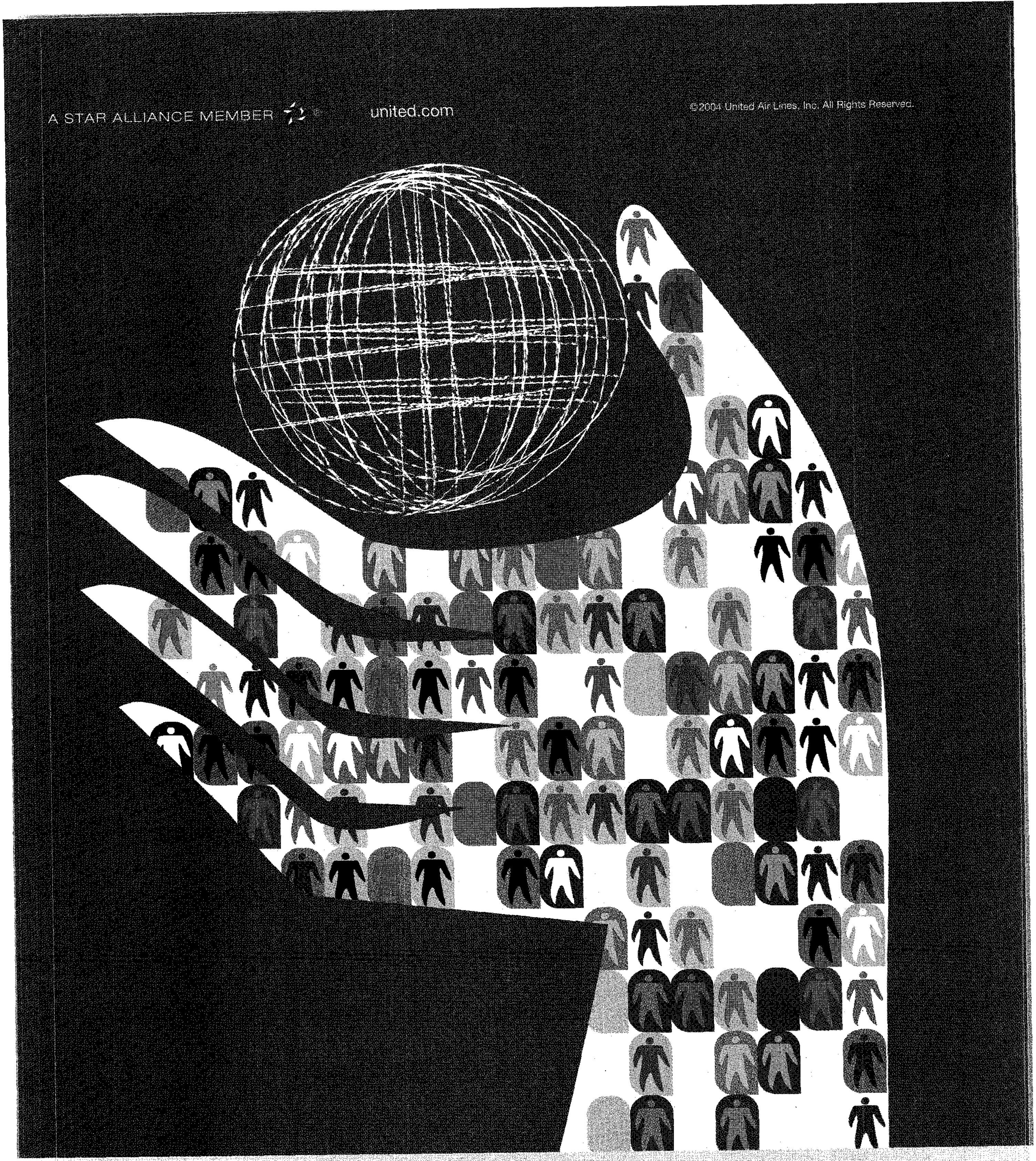
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[1] Will Blythe,
The New York Times Book Review

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CONTRIBUTORS

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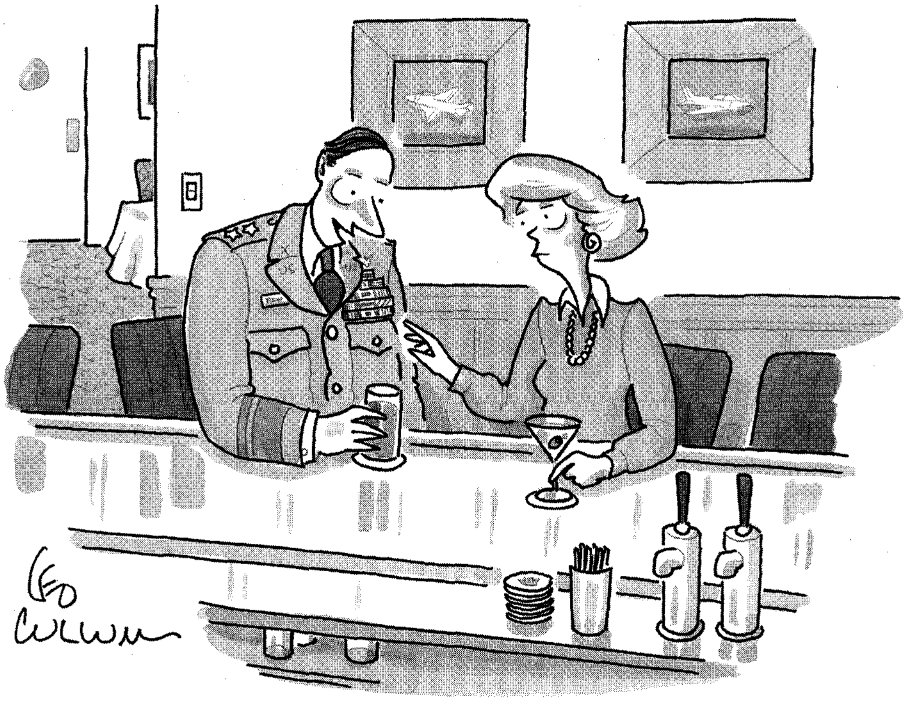
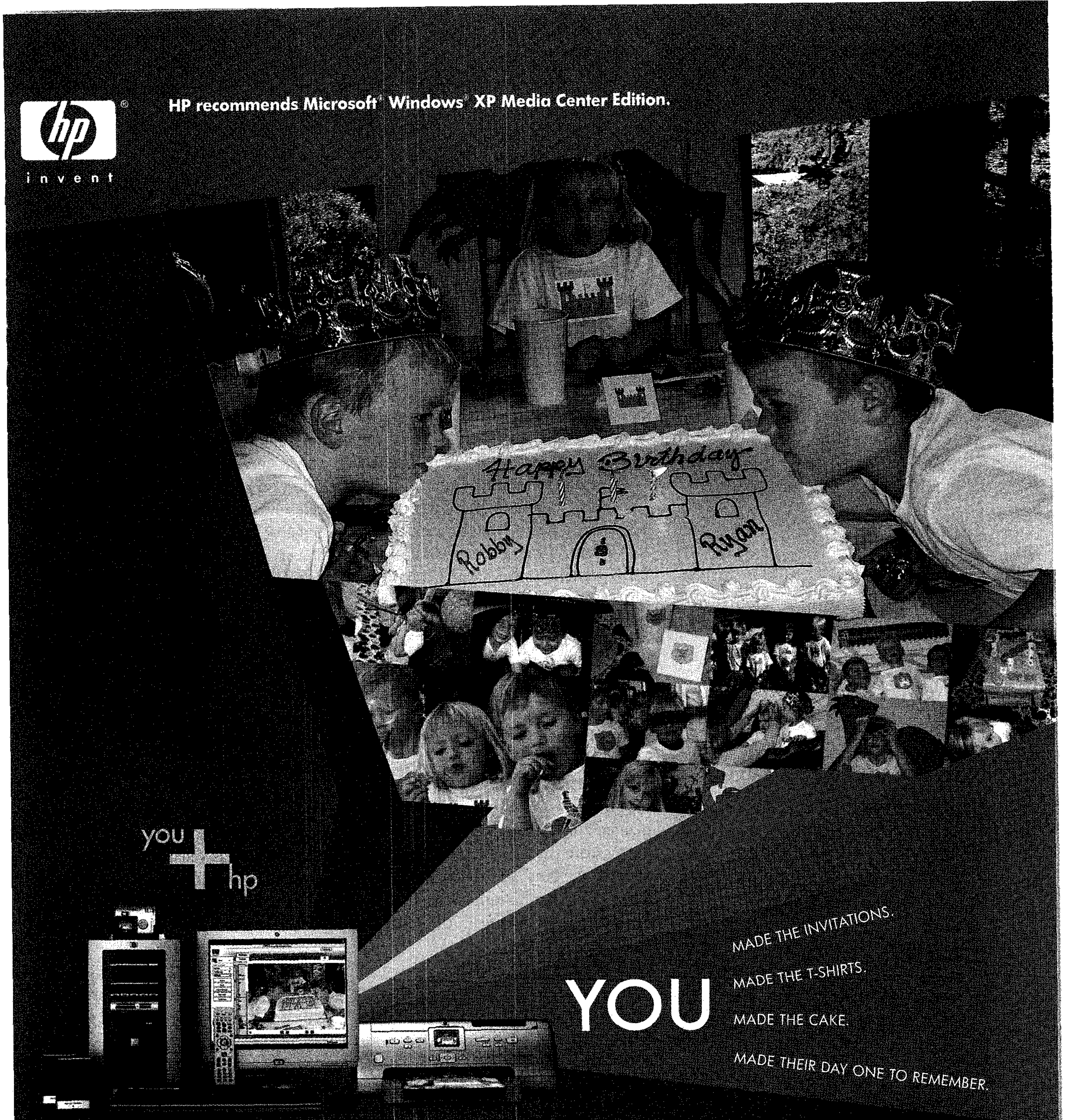
Roz Chast (The Back Page, p. 106) has a new collection of cartoons, "The Party, After You Left," coming out next month. ♦



"That one is for going AWOL but coming right back."



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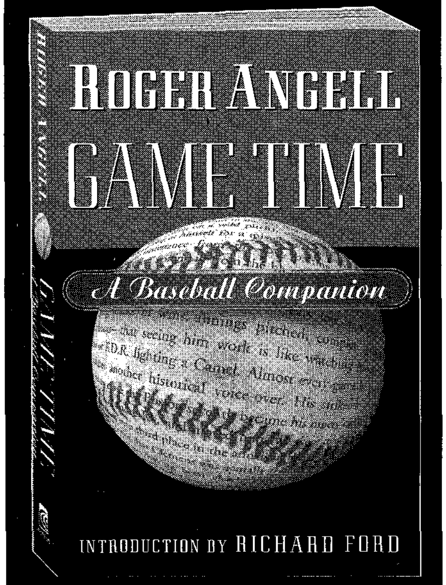

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THE BONES IN THE MUSEUM

No one would deny the achievements of the anthropologist Franz Boas in combating and reducing institutionalized racism; and he was, as Claudia Roth Pierpont makes clear, a fascinating man ("The Measure of America," March 8th). But in his relations with the individuals he studied, Boas, at times, came up short. When the explorer Robert Peary went to Greenland in 1897, Boas said that he'd like him to return with an Inuit to "enable us to obtain leisurely certain information." Peary brought back six Inuit to New York, where they were housed in the basement of the American Museum of Natural History; four of the party quickly died. (I wrote about their case in my book, "Give Me My Father's Body," published in 2000.) Boas and the museum were responsible for having their bodies dissected and kept in the museum. Boas was also part of a phony funeral for one of them, Qisuk, staged to deceive Qisuk's son, Minik. When the ruse was discovered years later, Boas explained that it had been done, as a reporter from the *Evening Mail* wrote, "to appease the boy," and to keep him from discovering that his father's skeleton had been placed on exhibit in the museum.
Kenn Harper
Iqaluit, Nunavut, Canada

Pierpont, in her discussion of Boas's struggles against the proto-Nazism championed by H. F. Osborn, of the American Museum of Natural History, describes Osborn's work with the museum's dinosaur fossils, writing that he "surrounded the skeletons with murals of living dinosaurs lumbering about the earth—images that were so widely reproduced that by the turn of the century the fantastical dragons had become as much a part of American childhood as baseball or cowboys and Indians." As a footnote, it should be noted that virtually all of Osborn's mounted dinosaurs were wrong, especially his tail-dragging, boxer-stanced theropods. He put them in poses that were anatomically impossible; in fact, theropods walked with backs horizontal to the ground, necks usually S-shaped, and tails elevated to counterbalance the weight of the skull.
Stephan Pickering
Santa Cruz, Calif.

PEGLER'S McCARTHYISM

To discuss the late columnist Westbrook Pegler without mentioning his championing of Senator Joseph McCarthy, as William F. Buckley, Jr., does, is a monumental omission ("Rabble-Rouser," March 1st). Pegler was probably the Senator's most potent journalistic ally in spreading his calumnies. His support for McCarthy was also, in one respect, brave: whereas Pegler had to answer in court for his libellous statements, McCarthy could lie at will in the well of the Senate without a legal worry in the world. He refused challenges to back up his lies off the Senate floor, where he could be sued.
C. W. Griffin
Phoenix, Ariz.

Buckley, after quoting a piece in which Pegler heaps scorn on a certain "Villard," asks, "Who was Villard? But it doesn't really matter, does it, when reading Pegler." As the owner of the New York *Evening Post* and *The Nation*, however, Oswald Garrison Villard was more than a forgettable footnote in literary and political history. In fact, it was under Villard's leadership that *The Nation* became a leading liberal journal. And, before W. E. B. DuBois launched *The Crisis*, Villard used his *Evening Post* to organize and promote what would become the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. The N.A.A.C.P.'s first headquarters was in the *Evening Post's* building, given to the fledgling organization free of charge by Villard.
Adena Spingarn
New York City

•

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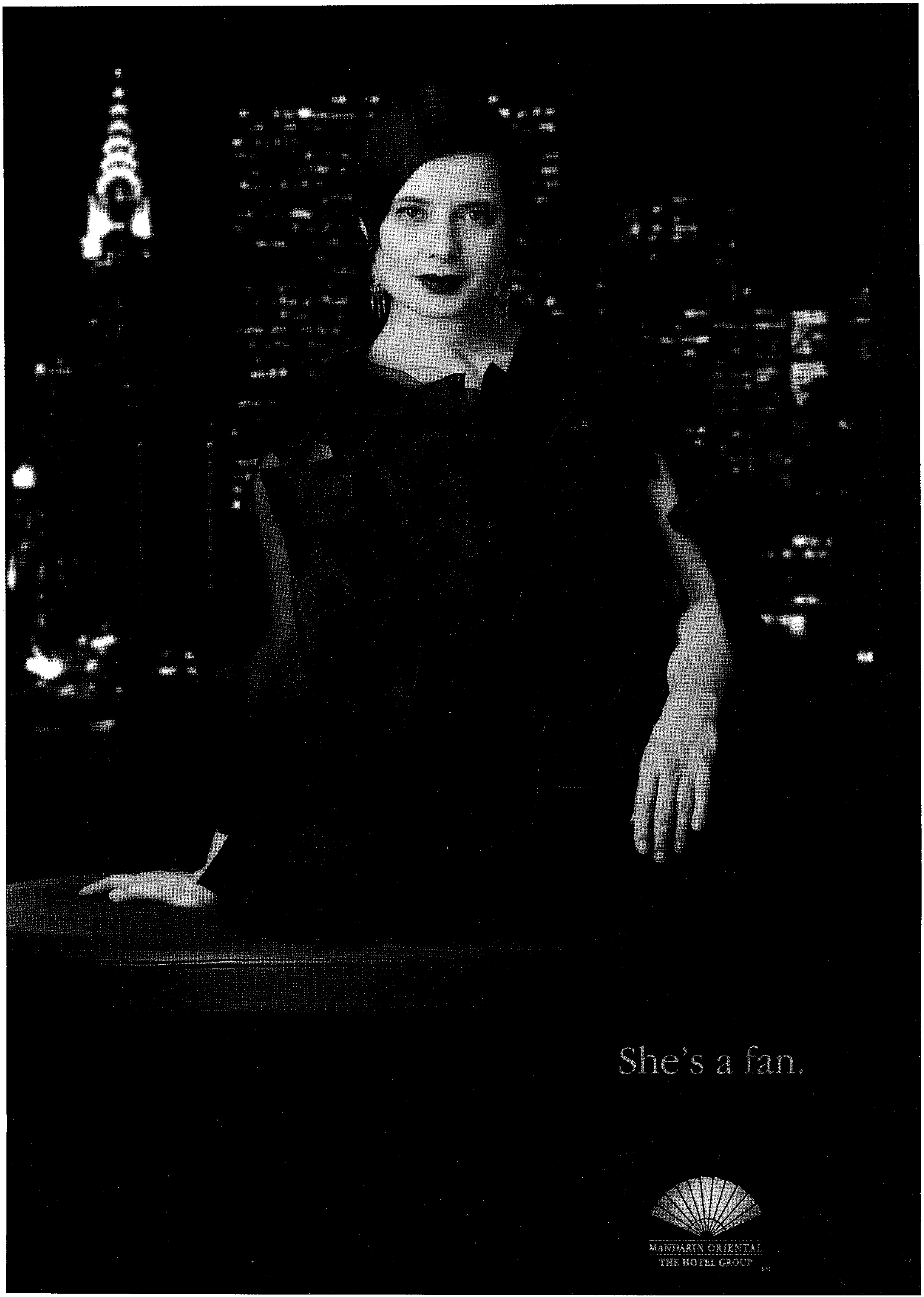
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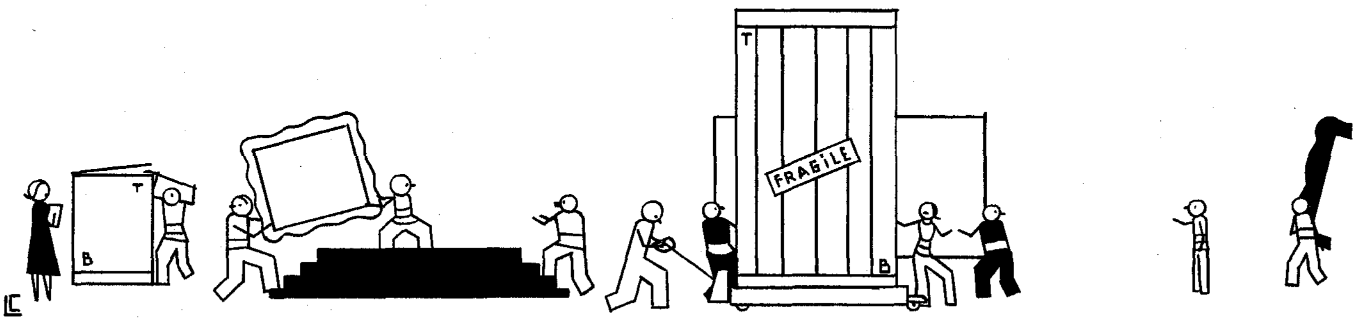

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For expanded events listings, please visit www.newyorker.com/goingson.

THIS WEEK
SPIRITS OF MODERN EGYPT

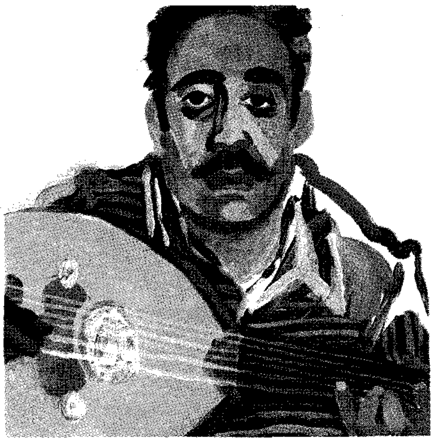
The Egyptian singer Um Kulthum, who died in 1975, was beloved throughout the Arab world. Millions of fans joined her funeral procession through the streets of Cairo, and Egyptian radio stations still broadcast her music. The composer Muhammad Abdul Wahhab, a compatriot of hers who died in 1991, was a self-professed modernist who introduced jazz, waltzes, tango, and other Western elements into Arab classical music. The two were competitors but worked together in the sixties (Kulthum was first accompanied by electric guitar on a Wahhab song, "Inta Umri," in 1964). The oud master Simon Shaheen and his Near Eastern Music Ensemble, along with the guest vocalist Rima Khcheich, pay tribute to them. (Zankel Hall, March 27; see Night Life.)

SHE FALLS TO PIECES

Cynthia Hopkins, who has won two Obies and a Bessie for her work with Big Dance Theatre, is better known for her band, Gloria Deluxe, which showcases her Patsy Cline-meets-Patti Smith vocals. This week, she presents "Accidental Nostalgia," an alt-country operetta with fantastical elements—at one point, playing cards emerge from Hopkins's mouth—about an amnesiac obsessed by her past. (St. Ann's Warehouse, starting March 26; see Theatre.)

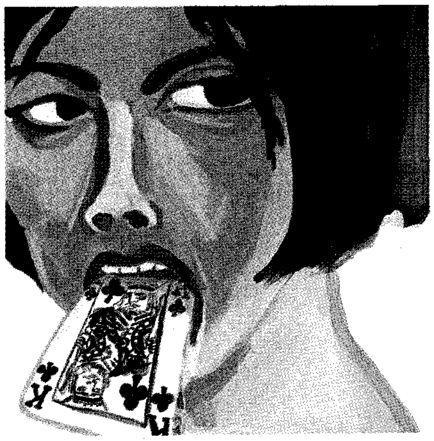
FROM FAR TO NEAR

The "New Directors/New Films" festival arrives this week. Where else would you find the latest Mongolian film sensation ("The Story of the Weeping Camel") alongside the documentary "Dig!," which tracks the rise and fall of the indie-pop band the Brian Jonestown Massacre? The opening night features the director Jim McKay, who dramatized the life of three Brooklyn marching-band mates in "Our Song" and revisits the borough for "Everyday People," a look at a beloved neighborhood restaurant. (Lincoln Center, March 24; see Movies.)



A tribute to the Egyptian singer Um Kulthum, at Zankel Hall.

The dramatic feature "Everyday People," in the "New Directors/New Films" series.



Cynthia Hopkins's alt-country operetta, "Accidental Nostalgia," at St. Ann's.

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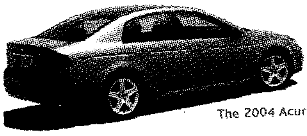

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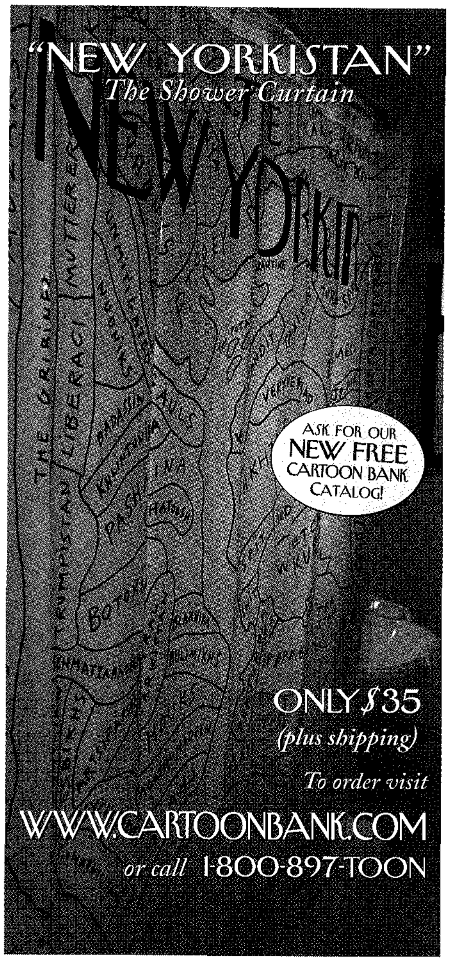

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OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

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ACCIDENTAL NOSTALGIA
A new musical by Cynthia Hopkins, choreographed by Jordana Toback and directed by DJ Mendel (see This Week). Opens March 26 at 8. Through April 4. (St. Ann's Warehouse, 38 Water St., Dumbo, Brooklyn. 718-254-8779.)

BOMBAY DREAMS
A. R. Rahman's lavish musical about an Indian slum-dweller who wants to become a Bollywood star, which has been a hit in London for two years, comes to New York. Based on an idea by Andrew Lloyd Webber and Shekhar Kapur, with a book by Thomas Meehan ("Hairspray") and Meera Syal and music by Rahman. The show's soundtrack has sold more than five million copies. Previews begin March 29. (Broadway, 1681 Broadway, at 53rd St. 212-239-6200.)

CHEF'S THEATRE: A MUSICAL FEAST
Part cooking show and part musical revue, this production also serves an actual dinner to its audience. Some of the city's top chefs take turns preparing a three-course meal and sharing their personal histories, accompanied by original songs by Broadway composers. The audience is invited to arrive at 6:30, the meal is served at intermission, and dessert comes in Act II. First up in the toque: Todd English, of Olives. Opens March 30 at 7:30. (Supper Club, 240 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

CITY CENTER: ENCORES!
The Gershwin musical "Pardon My English" (book by Herbert Fields and Morrie Ryskind), which includes the songs "Isn't It a Pity" and "The Lorelei," was a flop in 1932 but has been substantially reworked by David Ives for this production. Directed by Gary Griffin. March 25-28. (131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

EARS ON A BEATLE
Dan Lauria and Bill Dawes portray two undercover F.B.I. agents who conduct surveillance on John Lennon in the nineteen-seventies. Written and directed by Mark St. Germain ("Camping with Henry and Tom"). In previews. Opens March 28 at 7. (DR2, at 103 E. 15th St. 212-239-6200.)

FROM DOOR TO DOOR
A comedy about smothering mothers and single parenthood by James Sherman ("Beau Jest"). Directed by Joe Brancato. Opens March 24 at 6:45. (Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 212-239-6200.)

HANNAH & MARTIN
Kate Fodor's play about the relationship between Hannah Arendt and Martin Heidegger, Arendt's onetime philosophy professor and lover, stars David Strathairn and Melissa Friedman. Directed by Ron Russell. A production of the Epic Theatre Center. In previews. (Manhattan Ensemble Theatre, 55 Mercer St. 212-279-4200.)

MR. FOX: A RUMINATION
The final offering of the Signature Theatre Company's Bill Irwin season is a reflection on the life of the celebrated clown George L. Fox (1825-77). Directed by James Houghton. In previews. (Peter Norton Space, 555 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529.)

MRS. FARNSWORTH
Electoral politics are the focus of a new comedy by A. R. Gurney that stars Sigourney Weaver, John Lithgow, and Danny Burstein. Directed by Jim Simpson. In previews. (Flea, 41 White St. 212-352-3101.)

A RAISIN IN THE SUN
Sean (P. Diddy) Combs, Audra McDonald, and Phylicia Rashad star in a revival of Lorraine Hansberry's play about three generations of a family who live under the same roof on the South Side of Chicago. Directed by Kenny Leon. Previews begin March 30. (Royale, 242 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

ROAR
In a new play by Betty Shamieh ("Chocolate in Heat"), set in Detroit after the first Gulf War, a Palestinian-American family takes in a relative who arrives from Kuwait. Directed by Marion McClinton. In previews. (Clurman, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200.)

TABLES FOR TWO

THE BILTMORE ROOM
290 Eighth Ave., at 25th St. (212-807-0111)—The polished panels of pink and rose and black marble covering the walls here once graced the lobby of midtown's Biltmore Hotel; after that, they lent authenticity to Rome, a gay bar that previously occupied the space. You won't find that mentioned in the current owner's press kit, but it's fun to scan the room in the early evening—the only time you can reliably get a table without a six-week wait—and imagine, among the beehived ladies and their tweedy dates, a staff dressed as centurions. Later in the evening, the crowd turns sleek and foxy, making the place seem more in tune with its funky block in Chelsea.

Acclaimed in his former posts at Aja, Match, and Mi, the chef Gary Robins has such a deft touch with global spices that he can make a menu with ideas from India, North Africa, and Latin America seem perfectly natural. There's a lot of ginger—in the cucumber sorbet that refreshes a seared-tuna appetizer and in an improbably wonderful carrot-lobster-and-chanterelle soup. His perfect touch extends to texture, too, the true strength of the entrées: the sage crust on seared duck breast with figs, the wild king salmon with its simple accompaniment of steamed spinach, and the crispy rice coating on the snapper with edamame potato salad.

It must be hard to resist righteous food-temple seriousness when the food is this good. But the service is formal without being uptight, and the whole operation even seems to have a sense of humor. There's a cell-phone booth, sumptuously padded in leather, which gets terrible reception. Blocky vinyl chairs can make you feel like you're driving somewhere in a low-slung muscle car. And, rather than the old Biltmore clock, high up on the back wall above the fireplace there's a humble little brass-tone clockface that looks like it's from the dashboard of a Winnebago. (Open daily for dinner. Entrées $27-$35.)

—*Owen Phillips*

SARAH, SARAH
Manhattan Theatre Club presents a new play by Daniel Goldfarb, set in Canada in 1961 and in China in 2001, about an immigrant woman who opposes her son's marriage. J. Smith-Cameron plays the matriarch in the first act and her granddaughter in the second. Directed by Mark Nelson. In previews. Opens March 30 at 7:30. (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

SIXTEEN WOUNDED
A new play by Eliam Kraiem about a friendship between a Jewish baker and a young Palestinian man, with Judd Hirsch, Martha Plimpton, Omar Metwally, and Jan Maxwell. Directed by Garry Hynes. In previews. (Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200.)

SLY FOX
Arthur Penn directs a revival of Larry Gelbart's comedy, an update of Ben Jonson's "Volpone" that transplants the action to Gold Rush-era San Francisco. With Richard Dreyfuss, Eric Stoltz, and Elizabeth Berkley. In previews. (Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

TWENTIETH CENTURY
Alec Baldwin and Anne Heche lead the cast in the Roundabout Theatre's revival of Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur's comedy about a man who transforms a chorus girl into a leading lady. Directed by Walter Bobbie. Two previews on March 24. Opens March 25 at 7. (American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300.)

WELL
Lisa Kron presents a new play, a "solo show with other people in it," in her trademark wry, garru-

lous vein. Directed by Leigh Silverman. In previews. Opens March 28 at 7. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-239-6200.)

OPENED RECENTLY

BIG BILL
A. R. Gurney's gallant new play, ably directed by Mark Lamos, explores the duality of the character of the historic tennis player Bill Tilden—genial, masculine sports hero versus sensitive and optimistic Peter Pan—in a series of scenes that shift in perspective with near-cinematic fluidity. John Michael Higgins, who plays Tilden, is a wonderful actor, bathed in a quiet and respectable kind of decency. You can tell that he's thrilled by the emotional trajectories that Gurney gives him to play with. Still, his characterization is flawed in exactly the way that this moving play is flawed: by too much politesse and not enough cringe-inducing darkness. (Reviewed in our issue of 3/15/04.) (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200.)

BRIDGE & TUNNEL
Sarah Jones, a sort of multicultural mynah bird, lays our mongrel nation before us with gorgeous, pitch-perfect impersonations. (3/8/04) (45 Bleecker Street Theatre, at 45 Bleecker St. 212-307-4100.)

BUG
A new dark comedy by Tracy Letts ("Killer Joe") rests on the device of a sci-fi conspiracy theory. A consortium of higher-ups have planted microbes under everyone's skin. Peter, a self-mutilating paranoid schizophrenic (played by Michael Shannon), meets Agnes (Shannon Cochran), the loneliest woman in Oklahoma, and turns her fleabag motel room into an entomology lab. In the name of love, she joins his campaign for the extermination of the ubiquitous parasites. Dexter Bullard directs. (Barrow Street Theatre, 27 Barrow St., at Seventh Ave. 212-239-6200.)

CIRQUE JACQUELINE
Andrea Reese performs her one-woman show about Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis. Directed by Charles Messina. Wednesdays at 7:30, through April 21. (Triad, 158 W. 72nd St. 212-352-3101.)

EMBEDDED
In a timely satire written and directed by Tim Robbins, media frenzy and front-line blunders attend a conflict in the Middle East. A production of the Actors' Gang. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-239-6200.)

FIDDLER ON THE ROOF
In this elegant revival, the star (Alfred Molina), the director (David Leveaux), the costume designer (Vicki Mortimer), and the set designer (Tom Pye) are English; they bring to the production a certain cultural detachment, which imposes a powerful lucidity on the story and allows its moral debate to gather proper poetic momentum. Every well-sculpted second has within it a sense of both regret and release, which makes the comic and tragic elements of the story at once nostalgic, evergreen, and adult. (3/8/04) (Minskoff, 200 W. 45th St. 212-307-4100.)

FROZEN
The New York première of a work by the British playwright Bryony Lavery, starring Swoosie Kurtz, Brían F. O'Byrne, and Laila Robins. Directed by Doug Hughes. (Reviewed in this issue.) (MCC at East Thirteenth Street Theatre, 136 E. 13th St. 212-279-4200.)

IN THE BELLY OF THE BEAST REVISITED
The playwright Adrian Hall has reworked his 1985 play about the convicted killer Jack Henry Abbott—whose correspondence with Norman Mailer made him a star of the Manhattan literary scene for a time, until he murdered again—in the wake of Abbott's suicide, in February of 2002. The original play focussed on Abbott; the new version has been expanded into an indictment of the penitentiary system (starting at the age of twelve, Abbott spent nearly all of his life behind bars). With a tightly controlled performance by David Mogentale that humanizes Abbott without disguising his violent nature. Directed by Leo Farley. (29th Street Repertory, 212 W. 29th St. 212-868-4444.)

JOHNNY GUITAR
A new musical based on Nicholas Ray's film has a book by Nicholas van Hoogstraten, music by Martin Silvestri, and additional music and lyrics by Joel Higgins, who directs. (Century Center for the Performing Arts, 111 E. 15th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE JOURNALS OF MIHAIL SEBASTIAN
Stephen Kunken stars in a play about the life and times of the Romanian novelist and playwright, adapted by David Auburn ("Proof") from the diaries that Sebastian wrote during the Second World War. A Keen Company production. Directed by Carl Forsman. (Theatre at 45th Street, 354 W. 45th St. 212-868-4444.)

THE LIFE OF SPIDERS
In a new play by Kelly Stuart, a Frenchman hits Belle Époque Paris with a fabric made from spider's silk, which he hopes will win him social entrée. Directed by Rebecca Holderness, of the Holderness Theatre Company. (Culture Project, 45 Bleecker St. 212-352-3101.)

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM
The British director Edward Hall makes his New York début with the Watermill Theatre production of Shakespeare's comedy, performed by Hall's all-male company, Propellor. (BAM's Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St. 718-636-4100. Through March 28.)

THE MOONLIGHT ROOM
Tristine Skyler's critically lauded play, about two teen-agers at a hospital who are waiting for news about a friend who has overdosed, has reopened on Theatre Row. Directed by Jeff Cohen. (Beckett, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200.)

MY KITCHEN WARS
Dorothy Lyman stars in her adaptation of Betty Fussell's memoir about her thirty-year marriage to the Princeton professor Paul Fussell. Directed by Elinor Renfield. (78th Street Theatre Lab, 236 W. 78th St. 212-868-4444.)

OPEN HEART
Robby Benson ("Ice Castles") wrote the book, score, and lyrics for this new musical comedy about open-heart surgery, in which he also stars. He has under-

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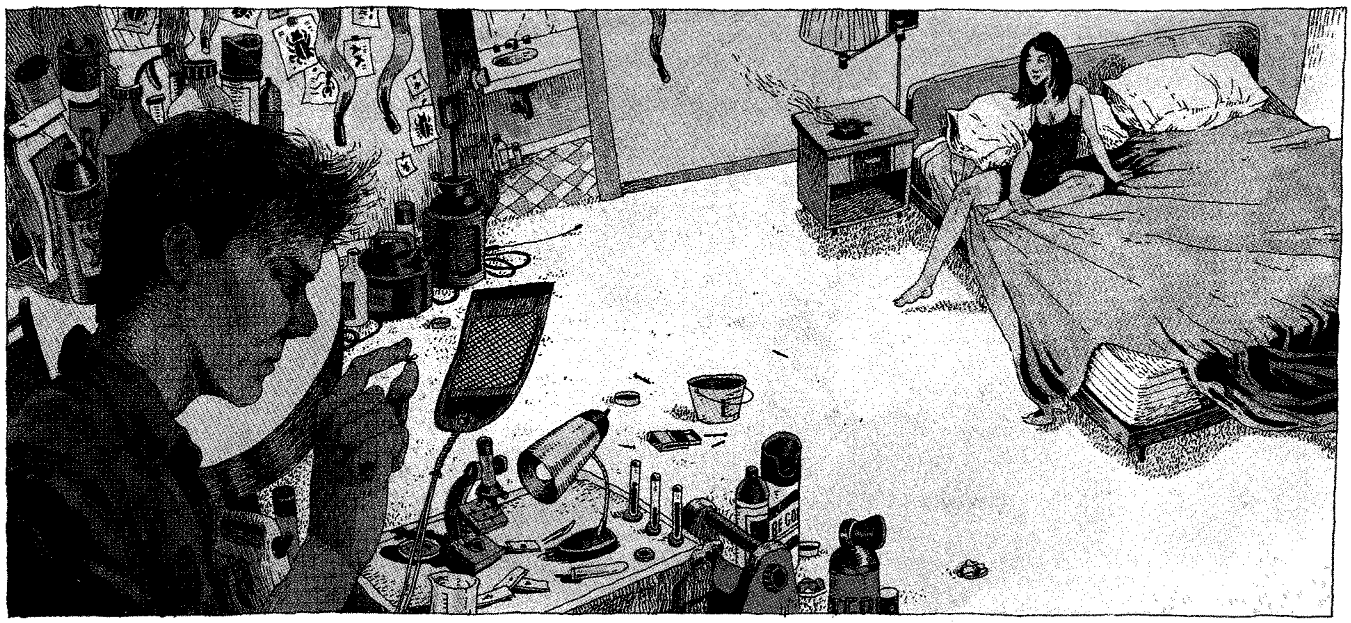
Additional support provided by the National Endowment for the Arts. Indemnity granted by the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities.
The Metropolitan Museum of Art acknowledges Amtrak's promotional support of the *Byzantium* exhibition.
Icon of the Archangel Gabriel (detail), 13th century, The Holy Monastery of Saint Catherine, Sinai, Egypt.

gone the procedure twice. Directed by Matt Williams. (Cherry Lane, 38 Commerce St. 212-239-6200.)

POOR THEATER
The Wooster Group presents a work in progress. (Performing Garage, 33 Wooster St. 212-966-3651.)

SILENT LAUGHTER
A farce inspired by silent movies, performed by a cast of ten and accompanied by movie-house organ music, written by Billy Van Zandt and Jane Milmore. Van Zandt directs. (Lamb's Theatre, 130 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE SLUG BEARERS OF KAYROL ISLAND; OR, THE FRIENDS OF DR. RUSHOWER
An absurdist rock musical conceived, directed, and designed by the cartoonist Ben Katchor ("Julius Knipl, Real Estate Photographer"). With music by Mark Mulcahy. (The Kitchen, 512 W. 19th St. 212-255-5793, ext. 11. Through March 27.)



Michael Shannon and Shannon Cochran star in "Bug," a new play by Tracy Letts ("Killer Joe"), at the Barrow Street Theatre.

JOHN HENDRIX

THE STENDHAL SYNDROME
In Terrence McNally's twin bill at Primary Stages, the playwright displays his narrative skill, his sense of fun, his love of music, and his ability to turn a threadbare trope into a surprising, complex gesture. (3/1/04) (59E59 Theatre, 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

WAVE
Will Pomerantz ("Tatjana in Color") directs the Ma-Yi Theatre Company in a new play about an Asian-American family bedevilled by a fascination with fame and firearms. (Ohio Theatre, 66 Wooster St. 212-352-3101.)

YEARDLEY SMITH: MORE
Smith, the actress who provides the voice of Lisa on "The Simpsons," has written an autobiographical solo play, in which she stars. Directed by Judith Ivey. (Union Square Theatre, 100 E. 17th St. 212-307-7171.)

DANCE

"IT TAKES TWO"
American Ballet Theatre's Studio Company prepares young dancers to enter A.B.T. and serves as a forum for emerging choreographers. It has become a breeding ground for ballet stars, such as the recently promoted soloist David Hallberg. The troupe makes its Joyce Theatre début with Ashton's "Monotones" and Balanchine's daredevil "Tarantella," honoring the choreographers' shared centennial. There are also two world premières: Laura G. Miller's playful "Milk Pool," which takes musical and atmospheric cues from Pedro Almodóvar, and Brian Reeder's busy "Staged Fright," which is informed by Hitchcock films. The young, energetic dancers of the Ailey II company share the program and also make their Joyce débuts, presenting works by modern choreographers. (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. March 30 at 8. Through April 4.)

THE STEPHEN PETRONIO COMPANY
The company continues its season at the Joyce, presenting last season's "City of Twist" and also performing the new work "The Island of Misfit Toys," with music by Lou Reed, a set by Cindy Sherman, and costumes by Tara Subkoff. (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. March 24-27 at 8 and March 28 at 2 and 7:30.)

DAVID DORFMAN DANCE
The 92nd Street Y's Harkness Dance project closes out its season with two new works by Dorfman. "Light Bulb Theory," which has a piano score by Michael Wall, is about two kinds of light bulbs: those which flicker before they go out and those which "just go out." The dancers portray variations on the theme with increasing desperation. In "Impending Joy," the dancers are wrapped in the wire and posts of broken fences, break free, and then reëntrap themselves. (The Duke on 42nd Street, 229 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200. March 24-25 at 8, March 27 at 8, and March 28 at 2 and 7.)

DANCE THEATRE WORKSHOP
"Acre," Brian Brooks's multimedia meditation on the color green, shares the bill with Julie Atlas Muz's take on Stravinsky's "The Rite of Spring," which makes psychosexual allusions that include O'Keeffian blooms, high-school hazing rituals, and child beauty pageants. The Butcher Shop Quartet plays a live rock rendition of the score. (219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. March 24-25 at 7. Through April 3.)

"HIC + NUNC"
Jessica Nicoll and Barry Oreck present an evening of duets and solos that make much of their contrasting sizes (she's tiny, he's very tall). The title work is an exploration of the cell phone's grip on modern society; other pieces portray disoriented travellers and miscommunicating lovers. (Danspace at St. Mark's In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 212-674-8194. March 25-28 at 8:30.)

"131"
The second week of performances of a danced interpretation of Beethoven's String Quartet in C-Sharp Minor, Op. 131, choreographed by Katherine Profeta. (P.S. 122, 150 First Ave., at 9th St. 212-477-5288. March 25-27 at 7:30 and March 28 at 5.)

"NO COMMON THREADS"
For "Luís," a solo suggested by stories about the killing of street boys in Latin America, the French musician Gilles Obermayer has composed a piece with text, accompanied by the *berimbau,* the Brazilian wire-and-wood percussion instrument used in capoeira. Obermayer performs the piece, walking across the stage as he strikes the music bow and narrates. He has also created a score for violin, cello, xylophone, and drum for the duet "Hudson River," choreographed by Jeff Moen and danced by Deanna Bergdorf and Lana Sealy. Obermayer shares the evening with Laura Flowers, who presents the quartet "Box Set," about friendship between young girls, and the solo "Let It Be," inspired by the writings of Gertrude Stein. (Merce Cunningham Studio, 55 Bethune St. 212-995-8711. March 26 at 9 and March 27-28 at 8.)

"UNDER EXPOSED"
Monica Bill Barnes and Shannon Hummel curate a weekend of dance for Dixon Place at the University Settlement, featuring fourteen dancers. (184 Eldridge St. 212-219-0736. March 25-27 at 8.)

NIGHT LIFE CONCERTS

JAZZ AT LINCOLN CENTER
Brad Mehldau, a lyrical young pianist who finds as much sustenance in the work of Radiohead and James Taylor as in the Great American Songbook, performs solo. (Kaplan Penthouse, Rose Building. 212-721-6500. March 23-27 at 8.)

GRANDADDY / SAVES THE DAY
Led by the high, plaintive vocals of Jason Lytle, the California band Grandaddy crafts spacey rock that often reflects on technology and modern loneliness (song titles include "Broken Household Appliance National Forest" and "Saddest Vacant Lot in All the World"). Grandaddy built their reputation with textured studio recordings, but they know how to entertain onstage and aren't above a classic rock-and-roll trick or two. They share the bill with New Jersey's Saves the Day, a quartet that's moved from post-punk to power pop. (Hammerstein Ballroom, Manhattan Center, 311 W. 34th St. 212-307-7171. March 26 at 6.)

"LIVE FROM HOME"
The winning acoustic-music series at Housing Works Used Book Café continues with **Dan Bern, Leona Naess,** and **Holly Williams.** (126 Crosby St. 212-334-3324. March 26 at 7:30.)

WORLD MUSIC INSTITUTE
March 26 at 8: Music of Scotland with the Battlefield Band. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th

St.) March 27 at 8:30: Simon Shaheen and the Near Eastern Music Ensemble (see This Week). (Zankel Hall, Carnegie Hall.) (For more information about both shows, call 212-545-7536.)

LEROY THOMAS AND THE ZYDECO ROADRUNNERS
Top-shelf dance music from southwestern Louisiana. (La Belle Époque, 827 Broadway, at 13th St. For more information, call 212-685-7597. March 27 at 8:30.)

CLUBS

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

BAM CAFÉ
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4139)—March 26-27: The Ukrainian singer and actress **Mariana Sadovska** makes a rare stopover in New York City. Sadovska is a specialist in fast-disappearing rural songs and arcane vocal traditions, and she brings them to life with gripping performances (she was once a member of one of Poland's leading avant-garde theatre companies). Her vocal approach incorporates an array of trills, runs, and quavers. She'll be joined by Kwartet Jorgi, who play many different instruments, including Carpathian shepherd's pipe, guitar, and a wide variety of homemade flutes.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL
237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—March 29: **Method Man,** the most celebrated member of Staten Island's hip-hop conglomerate the Wu-Tang Clan. The musician turned actor, who is currently working with his fellow-rapper Redman on a television comedy series, whets appetites for his third solo album, the much anticipated "Tical 0: The Prequel."

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—March 26: Sea chanteys, Celtic folktales, and the songwriter Colin Meloy's eccentric stories are given lush, almost baroque treatment by his band, the **Decemberists,** who have outgrown the smaller venues they played on their last trip through town.

THE HOOK
18 Commerce St., Red Hook, Brooklyn (718-797-3007)—March 26: **Glenn Tilbrook.** A recent episode of VH-1's "Bands Reunited" teased viewers with a Squeeze reunion that was sadly not to be. Fans of shimmering pop will have to be satisfied with the former front man's quiet solo performance. March 27: **Sons and Daughters,** from Glasgow, features two former associates of the melancholic Scottish outfit Arab Strap, but it is mostly concerned with the big, bad American West, as exemplified by Johnny Cash. Its album, "Love the Cup," pays tribute to the Man in Black.

IRVING PLAZA
17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (212-777-6800)—March 27: **Toots & the Maytals,** whose 1968 hit, "Do the Reggay," gave ska, dub, rock steady, and every other substratum of Jamaican music one all-encompassing name. Frederick (Toots) Hibbert and his Maytals have a new album, "True Love," that shows his influence on the rest of pop music. It features contributions by a slew of stars, from Eric Clapton, Jeff Beck, and Willie Nelson to Ben Harper, Rachel Yamagata, and Ryan Adams. March 28: **Coheed & Cambria** borrow equally from the angular post-punk of Fugazi and the progressive metal of Rush. Jittery blasts and yelping pathos merge with high-minded lyrical flourishes. Despite a few silly Tolkienesque song titles, the music might bring metal geeks and indie kids together.

KNITTING FACTORY
74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (212-219-3055)—March 26-27: The **Wrens,** the pride of Secaucus.

MERCURY LOUNGE
217 E. Houston St. (212-260-4700)—March 24: The singer-songwriter **Eliza Gilkyson.** March 26: **Singapore Sling,** a guitar-infatuated gang from Reykjavík, Iceland. March 27: Amsterdam's **Bettie Serveert.**

NORTHSIX
66 N. 6th St., Williamsburg, Brooklyn (718-599-5103)—March 24: **Sons and Daughters** (see The Hook). March 26: The **Fiery Furnaces** produced what was, perhaps, last year's most inventive début, "Gallowsbird's Bark." Matthew Friedberger handles most of the kitchen-sink instrumentation, and his sister Eleanor's deep, cool vocals emerge from the chaos with grace. March 27: Seattle's **Pretty Girls Make Graves** have charmed critics with their second album, "The New Romance," by capturing the spirit of vintage punk rock without sounding derivative or retro. March 28: The **Zambonis** are a Connecticut ensemble who stay true to their name: they perform hockey-related pop-punk songs.

SATALLA
37 W. 26th St. (212-576-1155)—March 23-28: The club presents "Africa Mondo," a festival with eighteen bands from more than ten countries. Opening night features **Francis Mbappe,** from Cameroon, and **Amayo,** the leader of the local Afro-beat ensemble Antibalas. March 24: The Nigerian drummer **Baba Ola Jagun** and the New York-based all-woman Afro-beat group **Femm Nameless.** March 25: The Cape Verdean vocalist **Maria de Barros.** The festival ends on March 28 with the Angolan singer **Bonga.**

SIN-É
150 Attorney St. (212-388-0077)—March 27: The club celebrates its first anniversary with the **High Strung, Bad Wizard,** the **Witnesses,** and others.

TONIC
107 Norfolk St. (212-358-7503)—March 30: **Roberto Rodriguez,** a percussionist for Joe Jackson and the only Cuban in Marc Ribot's band Los

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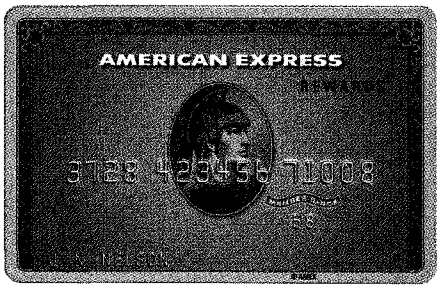

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Bombay Dreams
Set within India's bustling Bollywood industry, from which numerous big-budget movie musicals are made each year, this truly lavish production tells the story of a handsome young man who dreams of making it big, falling in love and searching for a happy ending as the cameras roll. Get great seats to this runaway smash!

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JAZZ AND STANDARDS

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—Through March 28: "A Jazz Tribute to Frank Sinatra." It's never a bad time to honor the Chairman of the Board, but, with the pianist **Hank Jones,** the trumpeter **Joe Wilder,** and the trombonist **Eddie Bert** on hand, this homage has particular depth.

CARLYLE HOTEL
Madison Ave. at 76th St. (212-744-1600)—The Café Carlyle, a snug, windowless enclave in the doorman district, features discreet waiters, wraparound murals, and, through March 27, **Betty Buckley.**

FEINSTEIN'S AT THE REGENCY
540 Park Ave., at 61st St. (212-339-4095)—Through April 3: **Ann Hampton Callaway** and **Liz Callaway,** sisters in song.

IRIDIUM
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—Through March 28: **Cecil Taylor,** the original bad boy of avant-garde piano, celebrates his seventy-fifth birthday by reconvening his raucous big band. Don't expect him to have mellowed with age. Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.**

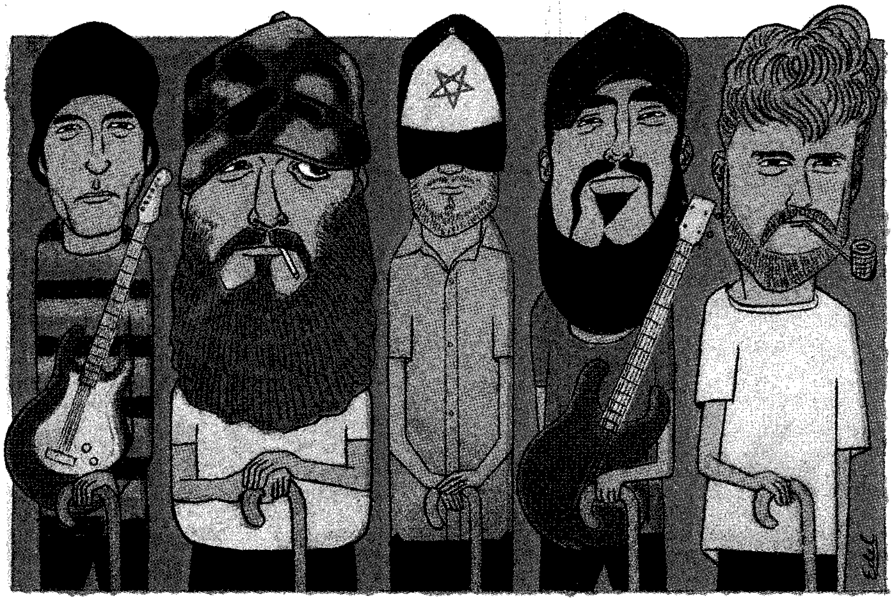
JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—**Marty Ehrlich,** one of the great, if still under-recognized, players, composers, and bandleaders of new jazz, is a master of many wind instruments and a multitude of musical idioms. He uses a rare week at a mainstream club to duet with **Myra Melford** and present his New Trio (both on March 25), his quartet (March 26-27), and the Julius Hemphill sextet, a saxophone ensemble that operates under Ehrlich's leadership (March 28).

SWEET RHYTHM
88 Seventh Ave. S., at Bleecker St. (212-255-3626)—March 26-27: The **Sonny Fortune** quartet. A few decades have passed since Fortune was on the bandstand with McCoy Tyner and Miles Davis, but this still energetic saxophonist stirs up plenty of trouble with his Coltrane-style playing. March 30: The seven-string guitarist **Bucky Pizzarelli,** as old school and elegant as they come, plays duets with the bassist **Jerry Bruno.**

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—Through March 28: **Fred Hersch.** The newly released "The Fred Hersch Trio +2" is one of this intriguing pianist's strongest albums. He brings in the whole band, which includes the trumpeter **Ralph Alessi** and the saxophonist **Tony Malaby,** for this engagement. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-879-5500)—The name Chuck Close instantly conjures images of giant gridded portraits, tight and deadpan in Photo-Realist black-and-white in the seventies, with more recent versions dissolving into loose lozenges of color. **"Chuck Close Prints: Process and Collaboration"** shows that all the portraiture of self and others went along with constant experiments in the practice of printmaking. Etchings, silk screens, linoleum and woodblock prints, and hand-constructed pulp-paper multiples are tracked through various proof states, and actual woodblocks, etched copper panels, and other studio paraphernalia also appear. Through April 18. ♦ Terra-cotta models were sculptors' preparatory sketches, clay versions of what would later be carved from stone. More than a hundred of them are on view in **"Playing with Fire: European Terracotta Models, 1740-1840,"** including diminutive works by Flaxman, Houdon, and Clodion. The eighteenth-century art star Antonio Canova's models—he called them *invenzioni*—are among the roughest and most spontaneous. His "Penitent Magdalen" and "Lamentation Over the Dead Abel" show what his sublime marbles never could: the hand of the artist and the heat of inspiration, captured forever in hasty tool marks and globs of modelled clay. Through April 25. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)



Grandaddy visits the Hammerstein Ballroom on March 26 (see Night Life).

EDEL RODRIGUEZ

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART (MOMA QNS)
33rd St. at Queens Blvd., Long Island City (212-708-9400)—**"Roth Time: A Dieter Roth Retrospective"** showcases more than three hundred and fifty works spanning five decades, including drawings, sculptures, videos, installations, and paintings. Through June 7. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, 10 to 5, and Friday evenings until 7:45.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"Singular Forms (Sometimes Repeated)"** fills the museum with classic minimalist and post-minimalist art of the last half-century, exalting what is still the chief aesthetic of our age. Emphasizing "reductive" sensibility—a qualifier rarely used since the nineteen-sixties—the curators smooth over theoretical antagonisms between sculpture (Judd, Andre, Flavin) and painting (Kelly, Ryman, Marden), thus giving weight to latter-day hybrid modes (Richter, Ray, Gober). Californian hedonism (Irwin, Turrell, McCracken) registers as strongly as phenomenological tough stuff (Morris, Serra, Nauman). Sumptuously seductive for all its austerities, the show reminds us that minimalism brought about a revolution in the decorative arts. Through May 19. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (212-570-3676)—A startlingly good Biennial banishes the gloom that has long beset the Whitney's programs on contemporary art. Painting and drawing reign. Handmade pictures exercise a gravitational tug on practically everything in the show, including sculptures, installations, videos, photographs, films, and digital animation. Paintings by younger artists like Elizabeth Peyton, Laura Owens, and Lecia Dole-Recio exchange energy with those by veterans like David Hockney, Mel Bochner, and Robert Mangold. Video installation emerges as a fully mature art form in strong works by Catherine Sullivan, Craigie Horsfield, Eve Sussman, and Slater Bradley. Installational hybrids of painting and sculpture—dominant in the last decade—show signs of exhaustion; an exception is a delightful neo-psychedelic disco by a group called assume vivid astro focus. Through May 30. (Open Wednesdays through Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

ASIA SOCIETY
Park Ave. at 70th St. (212-517-2742)—**"Paradise Now? Contemporary Art from the Pacific."** Through May 9. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6, and Friday evenings until 9.)

DAHESH MUSEUM
580 Madison Ave., at 57th St. (212-759-0606)—**"Staging the Orient: Visions of the East at La Scala and the Metropolitan Opera."** Through May 30. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 11 to 6.)

FRICK COLLECTION
1 E. 70th St. (212-288-0700)—**"A Beautiful and Gracious Manner: The Art of Parmigianino."** Through April 16. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6; Friday evenings until 9; and Sundays, 1 to 6.)

MUSEO DEL BARRIO
Fifth Ave. at 104th St. (212-831-7272)— **"MOMA at El Museo"** distills from the collections of the Museum of Modern Art a parallel Latin-American history of Mexican muralists, Caribbean Surrealists, Venezuelan geometricians, and Brazilian Conceptualists. For a change, works by José Clemente Orozco, Joaquín Torres-García, and Wifredo Lam appear not just as honorably marginal to Paris and New York but as touchstones of an independent tradition characterized by intense fantasy, intimations of tragedy, and utopian yearnings. Familiar things, such as paintings by Frida Kahlo and Matta, feel fresh; underknown artists (notably, the Brazilian abstractionists Hélio Oiticica and Lygia Pape, with works from the late nineteen-fifties and sixties) retroactively surprise; and strong contemporary artists like Gabriel Orozco and Doris Salcedo exude and inspire confidence. Through July 25. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 11 to 5, and Thursday evenings until 8.)

NATIONAL ACADEMY MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-369-4880)—Wolf Kahn serves as guest curator for the most recent of the National Academy's **"Artist's Eye"** shows. The landscapes he has chosen range from a tempestuous marine impasto by Albert Pinkham Ryder to Richard Estes's glinting row of Buicks in a parking lot. A pendant exhibition presents Kahn's own landscapes, which he describes as emanating from a "coloristic never-never land." Through April 18. (Open Wednesdays and Thursdays, noon to 5, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 6.)

GALLERIES-UPTOWN

Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6.

GLENN BROWN
Virtuosic paintings that combine Old Master sources with the existential grotesquerie of Francis Bacon. A Van Dyck painting becomes a psychedelic self-portrait with glazed eyes and swirling, multihued skin. A fetching Fragonard lass looks like a victim of consumption. Brown's panels appear

painterly, but it's a ruse; at close range the surfaces are as slick as airbrushed ads. Paradoxically, his sculptures take painterliness to extremes. Brown's deranged take on art history makes John Currin's narratives look tame. Through April 10. (Gagosian, 980 Madison Ave., at 76th St. 212-744-2313.)

WILLIAM KENTRIDGE
Two hand-drawn black-and-white films and thirty related drawings by South Africa's best-known artist. "Learning the Flute" is an animated surrealist symphony, projected onto an easel and set to the music of Mozart's "Magic Flute." Flying ibises circle a silhouette of the artist; metronomes morph into Egyptian pyramids; swirling geometric lines dance off a chalkboard. "Tide Table" covers different territory, using seaside scenes and a cabana that doubles as an interrogation cell to link his country's bucolic aspects with its brutal side. Through April 10. (Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 212-977-7160.)

GALLERIES-CHELSEA

BARBARA KRUGER
In a new installation, people face off in school cafeterias, at restaurants, and over family dinners, slipping into aggressive posturing or defensive retreat while their inner voices spin a play-by-play of anxious comment. The videos are projected at enormous scale on four walls, with a CNN-style crawl articulating the characters' unspoken thoughts. There is a nice disjunction between the words that Kruger has scripted and her actors' slightly wooden delivery. Still, the more didactic lines ("You want it. You buy it. You forget it.") fail to invite extended attention. Through April 24. (Mary Boone, 541 W. 24th St. 212-752-2929.)

ALLAN MC COLLUM AND MATT MULLICAN
In "Your Fate," a strangely affecting collaborative project by McCollum and Mullican, visitors to the gallery shake a black velvet bag of twenty-five dice onto felt-lined tables. The dice are imprinted with symbols devised by the artists—a court jester, a telephone receiver, a heart—and a handy booklet suggests how to use them to tell your fortune. Through April 4. (Burgin, 243 W. 18th St. 212-462-2668.)

ROBERT OVERBY
Drawings and oils on canvas by a second-generation Pop artist who explored the painterly possibilities of S & M and noir. Overby, who died in 1996, often left the pencil-drawn grids under his compositions visible, resisting the idea of a "finished" art work. "Madonna Ass" (1973-77) is a cropped view of a woman clad in crotchless leather panties. "Triangle Torso" (1973-77), which shows a woman's pubic zone against a moody pink sky, mixes Tiepolo with Magritte. A wall of drawings ranging from Mondrian grids to pulp-fiction subjects were made a decade before Richard Prince's first "Nurse" paintings, inspired by the covers of cheap paperback novels. Through April 3. (Fredericks Freiser, 504 W. 22nd St. 212-633-6555.)

YUTAKA SONE
"Amusement Romana" was originally conceived for the Villa Medici in Rome as a reference to ancient bread and circuses; the current version brings to mind playground equipment or a casino fountain run dry. After signing a waiver and removing their shoes, visitors can hop aboard a low-tech fibreglass-and-wood roller coaster, which curves like a Möbius strip and is painted swimming-pool blue. A smaller sculpture of Los Angeles freeways, done in marble and nestled in a room full of tropical plants at the Whitney Biennial, better displays Sone's talents. Through April 3. (David Zwirner, 525 W. 19th St. 212-727-2070.)

XIAOZE XIE
Lush, precise paintings of stacks of newspapers. Viewed from the side, and often bound with twine as though prepared for recycling, the stacks reduce the events of each day to slivers of text—"surprise threats . . . specter that the war could . . . quickly spiral"—and scraps of photographs: the bloom of an explosion, the geometry of a car's grille, a hand gripping the stock of a machine gun. The papers all date from late 2001 to early 2003, and the rapidity with which one day's violence was eclipsed by that of the next be-

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comes astonishing rather than numbing. Through April 10. (Cowles, 537 W. 24th St. 212-741-8999.)

Short List

LYNDA BENGLIS
Cheim & Read, 547 W. 25th St. 212-242-7727.
Through April 3.
ALIGHIERO E BOETTI
Gladstone, 515 W. 24th St. 212-206-9300.
Through March 27.
SLATER BRADLEY
Team, 527 W. 26th St. 212-279-9219.
Through March 27.
ALAN SARET
James Cohan, 533 W. 26th St. 212-714-9500.
Through March 27.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

SEBASTIAAN BREMER
Underneath the whorls, nets, and loops of white ink that thread the surfaces of Bremer's photographs, one glimpses blurry shadows of people, strips of landscape, barely discernible interiors. The painstaking filigree produces a hypnotic, Op-art-like effect. Through April 3. (Satellite, 94 Prince St. 212-966-9043.)

HELEN MIRRA
Oblongs of wood cut from shipping pallets, painted dark green and delicately flecked with the lighter tones of sunlit foliage, are pinned to the wall like little windows; strips of cotton imprinted with snatches of poetic text ("trees / composite beings / green syllables") are mounted in an eye-level line. The installation is quiet, but it manages to achieve a sweeping sense of open space and lend pathos to the discarded wood that once was forest. Through April 10. (Peter Freeman, 560 Broadway. 212-966-5154.)

Short List

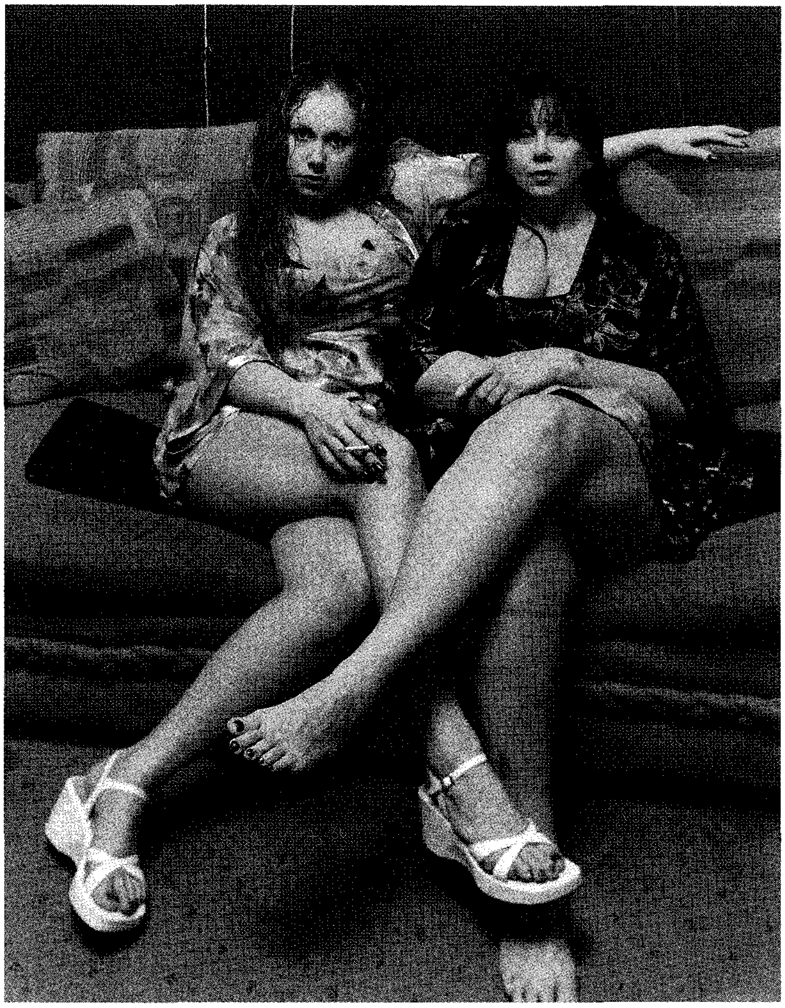
"SUBURBAN HOUSE KIT"
Deitch Projects, 18 Wooster St. 212-343-7300.
Through March 27.

PHOTOGRAPHY

RICHARD BARNES
Barnes's stark photographs of disarticulated animal skulls have a self-assured elegance. The way the skulls are mounted gives them an air of mystery as well as an unexpected kineticism; a hare's skull, broken into irregular, irreproducible chips, appears as a flock of ragged white birds in flight. The remains of a grinning human skull are both chilling and oddly exuberant. Through March 27. (Urbach, 526 W. 26th St. 212-627-0974.)

ANDREA MODICA
The muse of Modica's "Treadwell" photographs, which were first published as a book eight years ago, was a young girl named Barbara. Intensely pliable and arresting in her form—the best description is puffy—Barbara was a perfect subject, and Modica's pictures of her, posed in an odd manner in hardscrabble upstate-New York settings, are both surreal and beautiful. The photographs here, made over the fifteen years Modica knew her subject, are now an elegy; Barbara died in 2001, from the diabetes that made her body so memorable. The final two-thirds of the exhibition, details and distortions of Barbara's body and face, sometimes peaceful, sometimes asleep, form an overwhelmingly intimate portrait of her last years. Through April 17. (Houk, 745 Fifth Ave. 212-750-7070.)

ALEC SOTH
Soth lugged an eight-by-ten view camera the length of the Mississippi River, from his home in Minnesota to the southernmost part of Louisiana accessible by car, making landscapes, portraits, still-lifes, and photographs of abandoned rooms. Each image has a distinctive, often muted palette. The green of the river's edge in one picture is broken only by white morning glories and an abandoned metal bed frame. The dreary brownish-gray of the earth around the house in Dyess, Arkansas, that Johnny Cash grew up in is complemented by an ominous gray sky. Building on the school of photography practiced by Robert Frank, Garry Winogrand, William Eggleston, and Joel Sternfeld, Soth has found a brooding sexuality, an eccentric beauty, and an overwhelming sadness in the people and places along the river. A buff construction worker from Minneapolis sits in his kitchen in his jockey shorts; a mattress floats in the stagnant water at the river's edge in Arkansas; children hang out in an overgrown cemetery in New Orleans. The images are large, as big as fifty inches by forty inches, and elegantly composed. Through April 24. (Milo, 552 W. 24th St. 212-414-0370.)


"Mother and Daughter, Davenport, Iowa," by Alec Soth, at Yossi Milo.

MASSIMO VITALE
Vitale's large candy-gloss photographs of European vacationers have a slick, faintly bleached appearance, which captures both the unrealness and the lassitude of life on holiday. The pictures are sly: crowded beaches with many neat rows of chairs and umbrellas—and throngs of pale, determined people—appear to enforce torpor as much as they provide the setting for a hard-won idyll. Through April 10. (Benrubi, 52 E. 76th St. 212-517-3766.)

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY
The new show **"War in Iraq"** begins with a photograph by James Nachtwey of the smoldering ruins of the World Trade Center at night and a number of pictures taken in Afghanistan, but the heart of the show is the work from Iraq; though familiar from magazines and newspapers, it gains emotional weight when seen in a larger format. Two American soldiers drag the body of an Iraqi along a road; a bridge leading into Baghdad is taken by American troops, with casualties on both sides; Iraqi soldiers are shot at point-blank range; Shiites in Karbala celebrate their newfound religious freedom through self-flagellation. The brave photographers who bear witness are from the Paris-based photo agency VII, which was formed in September, 2001, just before the terrorist attacks. They include Christopher Anderson, Ron Haviv, Alexandra Boulet, Antonin Kratochvil, and Gary Knight. Through May 30. (1133 Sixth Ave. 212-857-0000.)

Short List

DIANE ARBUS
Grey, 100 Washington Sq. E. 212-998-6782.
Through March 27.
LEE FRIEDLANDER
Borden, 560 Broadway. 212-431-0166.
Through April 24.
LOTTE JACOBI
Jewish Museum, 1109 Fifth Ave. 212-423-3200.
Through April 11.

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

SOTHEBY'S
Asian Week continues. March 24 at 10:15 A.M.: An auction of Indian and Southeast Asian art is highlighted by a beautiful Gandhara figure of the Buddha from the second or third century A.D., more than five feet tall, with a youthful, idealized oval face and a muscular physique that betray its Roman influences. Also included are a circa-eleventh-century erotic sandstone bas-relief panel from Central India, mandalas, and jewelry, along with paintings by modern South Asian artists such as Francis Newton Souza, Ganesh Pyne, and N. S. Bendre. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.)

CHRISTIE'S
March 24 at 10 A.M. and 2: An auction of Chinese art works that features archaic bronzes, sculptures, pottery, porcelain, jades, and textiles, including a bright-blue imperial robe with eight writhing dragons embroidered in gold and silver thread. Infinitely more valuable is an eleventh- or twelfth-century B.C. *fangyi*, or bronze-covered wine vessel in the form of a small house. ♦ March 25 at 10 A.M. and 2: The final installment of Christie's Asian sales presents art from India and Southeast Asia, including a sensual twelfth-century sculpture of the Hindu goddess Parvati, wife of Shiva (always represented as a mature, beautiful woman), from southern India. The sale also features Tibetan and Khmer works, as well as modern Indian paintings by Krishen Khanna, Tyeb Mehta, and Ram Kumar, among others. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.)

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ANTIQUORUM
March 24 at 11 A.M. and 2: One can find the muse of Dada poetry (or of Mad Libs) lurking at this auction of luxury timepieces, which includes a 1940 Patek Philippe wristwatch with "a two-body, polished and brushed, screwed-down case back, concave lugs, dust-protecting cap" and a bronze-drenched rococo clock with "silk suspension" titled "Le Rapt de la Rose" (expected to bring up to forty thousand dollars). (Grand Havana Room, 666 Fifth Ave. 212-750-1103.)

SWANN
March 27 at 2: With Spirit and Opportunity scavenging for new auction lots on Mars, the house clears the decks with a sale of lunar-exploration memorabilia. The curios range from a ceramic Snoopy (the official NASA space-program mascot) that presided over Walt Cunningham's desk at NASA to Buzz Aldrin's much used Lactona toothbrush, which once battled plaque in orbit. The more solemn fare includes an American flag (acquired from Aldrin's personal collection) that accompanied the Apollo 11 moon shot. (104 E. 25th St. 212-254-4710.)

"ARTS OF PACIFIC ASIA"
The highly regarded show and sale of antiques and art from Asia and the Indian subcontinent sets up shop at the 69th Regiment Armory. (Lexington Ave. at 26th St. 212-532-1516. March 26-28.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC

OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA
The actress Marthe Keller's production of **"Don Giovanni,"** her Met début, lacks intensity; independent-minded women (Anja Harteros's regal Donna Anna, Christine Goerke's stentorian Donna Elvira) give themselves over to Thomas Hampson's subdued, plush-voiced Don in trancelike swoons. The singing is rich and lyrical all around, but the standout is the strapping René Pape's Leporello, who seems almost too confident to play sidekick to Hampson's Don; James Levine conducts. (March 24 and March 27 at 8.) ♦ The redoubtable Julius Rudel conducts a revival of **"Madama Butterfly,"** featuring Liping Zhang (as Cio-Cio San, in her Met début), Maria Zifchak, Richard Leech, and Dwayne Croft. (March 25 at 7:30 and March 30 at 8.) ♦ **"Rigoletto,"** with Ruth Ann Swenson, Irina Mishura, Ramón Vargas, and Franz Grundheber; Marco Armiliato. (March 26 at 8.) ♦ Karita Mattila—giving the performance of her life—sings the title role in Jürgen Flimm's new production of **"Salome."** Larissa Diadkova, Albert Dohmen, and Matthew Polenzani are her excellent colleagues; Valery Gergiev's conducting lets the score unfold with naturalness and ease. (March 27 at 2.) ♦ Otto Schenk's production of Wagner's "Der Ring des Nibelungen," which has three cycles of performances this spring, continues with **"Die Walküre,"** featuring (among others) Jane Eglen, Deborah Voigt, Plácido Domingo, James Morris, and Sergei Koptchak; Levine. (March 29 at 6:30.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

NEW YORK CITY OPERA
In a revival of Stephen Sondheim's **"Sweeney Todd,"** Mark Delavan's massive physique and booming baritone add power to the role of the bloodthirsty barber of Fleet Street; Elaine Page—bustling, saucy, and five feet tall—eases the tension as Mrs. Lovett, the baker who grinds Todd's victims into her pies. But the real stars of this production are Sondheim's gaily grisly lyrics and bittersweet music and Eugene Lee's infernal set (with its prison watchtowers, factory whistles, and trap-door chair). George Manahan conducts. (March 24 at 7:30 and March 28 at 1:30.) ♦ With Timothy Nolen replacing Delavan. (March 27 at 8. These are the final performances.) ♦ **"Le Nozze di Figaro,"** with Christine Brandes, Pamela Armstrong, Rinat Shaham, Kyle Ketelsen, and Brett Polegato; Steven Mosteller conducts. (March 26 at 8.) ♦ Marvin David Levy's **"Mourning Becomes Electra,"** with Lauren Flanigan, Emily Pulley, and Kurt Ollmann; Manahan. (March 27 at 1:30.) ♦ Not all of the Handel operas that City Opera chooses to embrace are first-rate, but there's no question about **"Xerxes,"** a brilliant creation exquisitely balanced between tragedy and farce. The company's acclaimed production returns with a cast headed by Sarah Connolly (in the title role), Amy Burton, and David Walker; Gary Thor Wedow. (March 30 at 7:30.) (New York State Theatre. 212-870-5570.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
Lorin Maazel conducts two big chunks of Viennese Romantic repertory, Schubert's "Unfinished" Symphony and Bruckner's Symphony No. 7. (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656. March 25 and March 30 at 7:30 and March 27 at 8.)

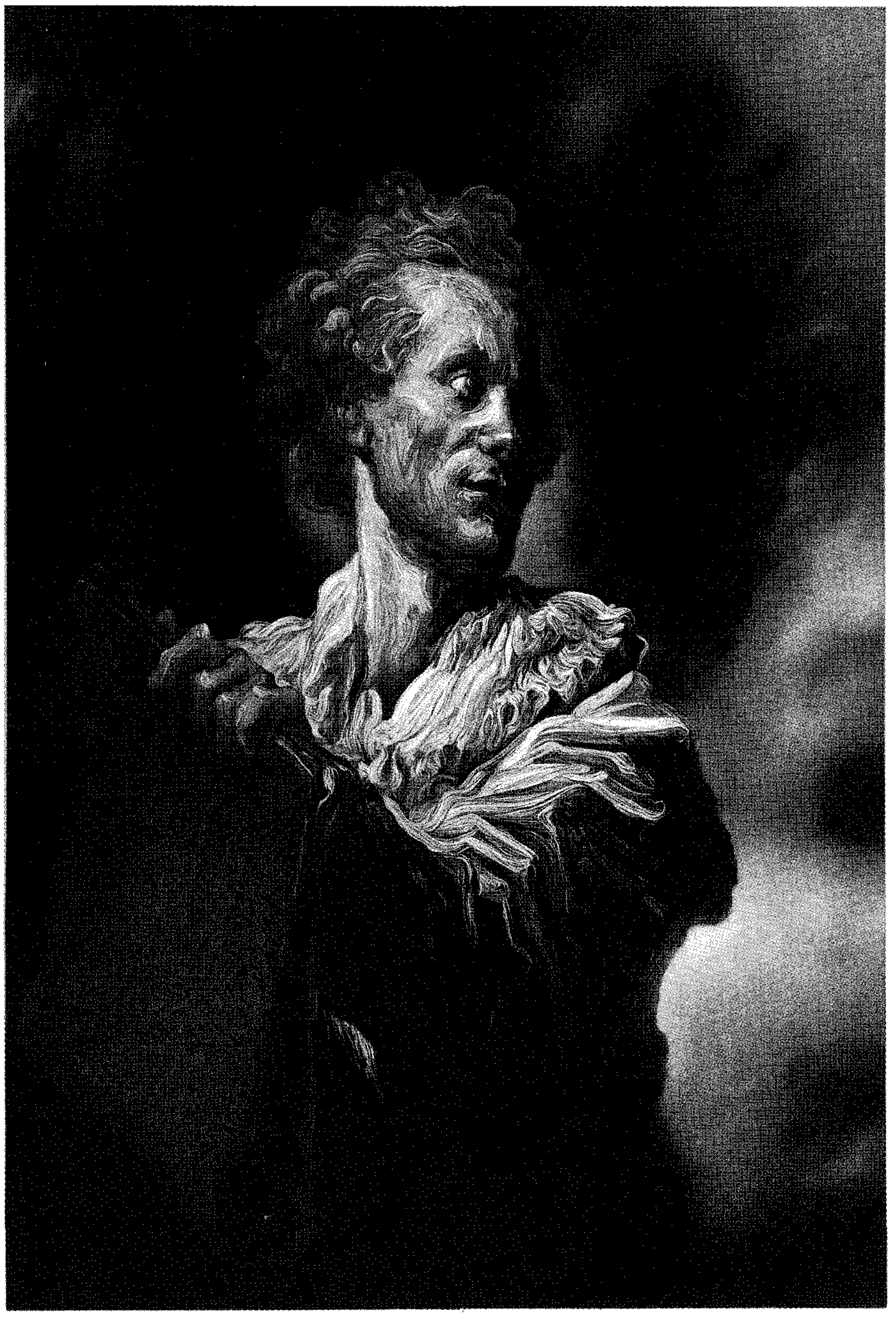
MUSICA SACRA
Richard Westenburg's chorus, one of the city's finest, offers a straightforward program of Eastertide classics, the (utterly different) Requiems of Mozart and Fauré. The vocal soloists include the soprano Kathy Jo Theil and the baritone Philip Cutlip. (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. March 24 at 8.)

ORCHESTRA OF THE AGE OF ENLIGHTENMENT
The harpsichordist Emmanuelle Haïm, making her New York conducting début, leads the period-instrument ensemble in Charpentier's "David et Jonathas," a sacred drama first published in Paris in 1981. The tenor Paul Agnew leads the cast. (Alice Tully Hall. 212-721-6500. March 25 at 8.)

SAN FRANCISCO SYMPHONY
Michael Tilson Thomas, the orchestra's music director, brings its glowing sound and crystalline precision to music by Berg (the Violin Concerto, with Gil Shaham) and Mahler (the Symphony No. 5 in C-Sharp Minor). (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. March 25 at 8.)

THE TALLIS SCHOLARS
March goes out like a lamb in George Steel's Miller Theatre schedule, closing with a concert by Peter Phillips's renowned choral group (offering sacred works by Josquin, Byrd, Palestrina, and others) in the nave of Riverside Church. (Riverside Dr. at 120th St. 212-854-7799. March 27 at 7.)

BROOKLYN PHILHARMONIC: "ALL THINGS BROOKLYN"
Well, some things Brooklyn, including the "Appalachian Spring" suite, by borough native Aaron Copland, and "Time Cycle" (with the soprano Jen-



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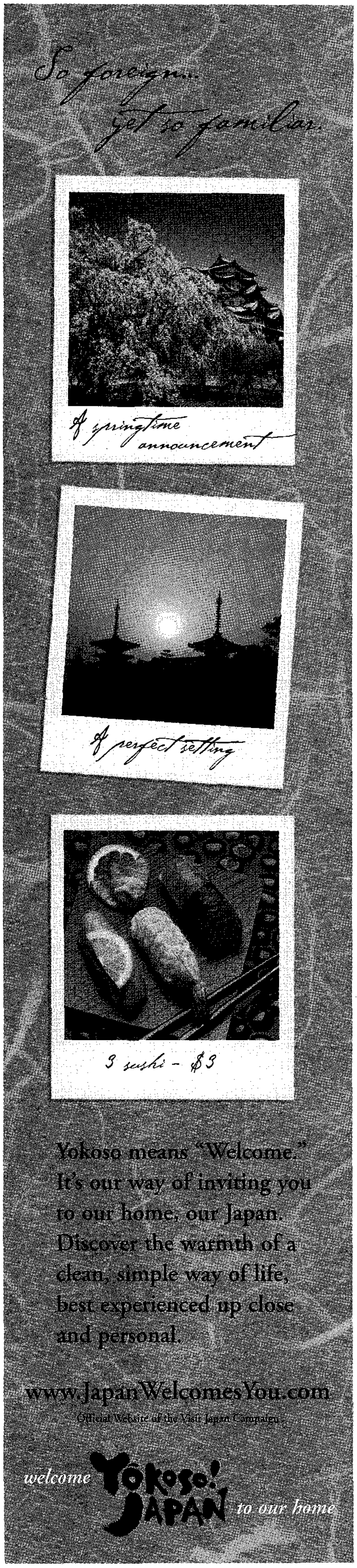
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nifer Alymer), by the Philharmonic's former music director Lukas Foss. They share the program with works by the Connecticut Yankee Charles Ives ("Washington's Birthday"), Elmira's Charles Griffes ("Roman Sketches"), and the Bostonian Leonard Bernstein ("Prelude, Fugue, and Riffs"). Ilan Volkov conducts. (Brooklyn Academy of Music, 30 Lafayette Ave. 718-622-5838. March 27 at 8.)

ORPHEUS CHAMBER ORCHESTRA
The ensemble commemorates the fiftieth anniversary of Ives's death by performing the chamber orchestra version of "Three Places in New England" (no small feat for this conductorless band), along with more easygoing fare by Piston, Copland ("Appalachian Spring"), and the bassist Edgar Meyer (his Concerto in D for Double Bass and Orchestra, with the solo part played by its virtuosic composer). (Carnegie Hall. 212-896-1704. March 27 at 8.)

PERLMAN MUSIC PROGRAM
The violinist Itzhak Perlman, beloved as both a teacher and a performer, conducts and plays with some of his student groups in a tenth-anniversary concert that features music by Vivaldi, Tchaikovsky, and Bach. (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. March 28 at 2.)

RECITALS

MUSIC AT MERKIN CONCERT HALL
March 24 at 8: The Festival Chamber Music Society (featuring the clarinettist Charles Neidich) proves its mettle with music that bridges the gap between Central and Eastern Europe—works by Mozart, Dvořák (the Piano Quartet in D Major), and Osvaldo Golijov ("The Prayers and Dreams of Isaac the Blind"). ♦ March 25 at 8: Robert Johnson's New York Philomusica goes Czech with a program featuring Janáček's Piano Sonata ("1905"), Kodály's Intermezzo for String Trio, and Dvořák's Piano Quintet. ♦ March 30 at 8: Concertante, a savvy young New York string sextet, combines the New York première of Jan Radzynski's "Five Duets" with music by Dvořák and Korngold (the sumptuous Sextet in D Major). (129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330.)

BARGEMUSIC
March 25-26 at 7:30: The pianist Sergey Schepkin devotes two programs to the Bach Partitas. ♦ March 27 at 7:30 and March 28 at 4: New-music mavens of a certain age have indelible memories of the baritone James Maddalena, who in the Houston Grand Opera's televised performances of John Adams's "Nixon in China" brought out the humanity beneath the thirty-seventh President's starched-shirt surface. He comes to the floating chamber-music series to sing Schubert's "Winterreise," with Schepkin at the piano. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083.)

MUSIC AT THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
March 25 at 8: The Israeli pianist Yael Weiss, a protégé of Richard Goode's, makes her New York recital début with an ambitious program of Berio, Copland (the formidable "Piano Variations"), Schumann, Beethoven (the "Waldstein" Sonata), and Michael Hersch (a world première). ♦ March 27 at 8: Menahem Pressler, celebrating his eightieth year, joins his young colleagues of the Beaux Arts Trio in piano trios by Ravel, Schubert (the Notturno in E-Flat Major), and Brahms. (Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. 212-570-3949.)

TOKYO STRING QUARTET
The ensemble continues its celebration of Schubert with the Quartet in D Minor ("Death and the Maiden"); their guest, the countertenor Bejun Mehta, sings a selection of songs with the pianist Israel Gursky. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. March 27 at 8.)

"ON WINGS OF SONG": JESSICA JONES
The Marilyn Horne Foundation's latest concert features the young American soprano in a recital of Sibelius, Barber ("Despite and Still"), and Strauss. (Kosciuszko Foundation, 15 E. 65th St. 212-734-2130. March 28 at 3.)

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC ENSEMBLES
Musicians from the orchestra gather to perform works by Beethoven, Carter, and Brahms (the Piano Quintet). (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330. March 28 at 3.)

CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER
An all-string program (with the violist Paul Neubauer) including music by Mozart, Dvořák (the Sextet in A Major), and Derek Bermel ("Soul Garden"). (Alice Tully Hall. 212-875-5788. March 28 at 5 and March 30 at 7:30.)

JUPITER SYMPHONY CHAMBER PLAYERS
The Jens Nygaard legacy series continues with a concert of music by Gambaro, Mozart, and Schumann (the Piano Quartet, featuring the violinist Mikhail Kopelman and the cellist Wendy Warner). (Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church, 152 W. 66th St. 212-799-1259. March 29 at 2 and 7:30.)

ALICE COOTE
The mezzo-soprano, hailed as the inheritor of the great British tradition of Kathleen Ferrier and Janet Baker, makes her New York recital début with a program of Haydn, Mahler (the "Rückertlieder"), and Schumann. Julius Drake accompanies her. (Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center. 212-721-6500. March 29 at 7:30.)

KALICHSTEIN-LAREDO-ROBINSON TRIO
The New York première of "For Daniel," Joan Tower's musical memorial to her nephew (who died after a long illness), is the highlight of the group's latest concert, which also includes piano trios by Mozart and Arensky (the elegiac Trio in D Minor). (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. March 30-31 at 8.)

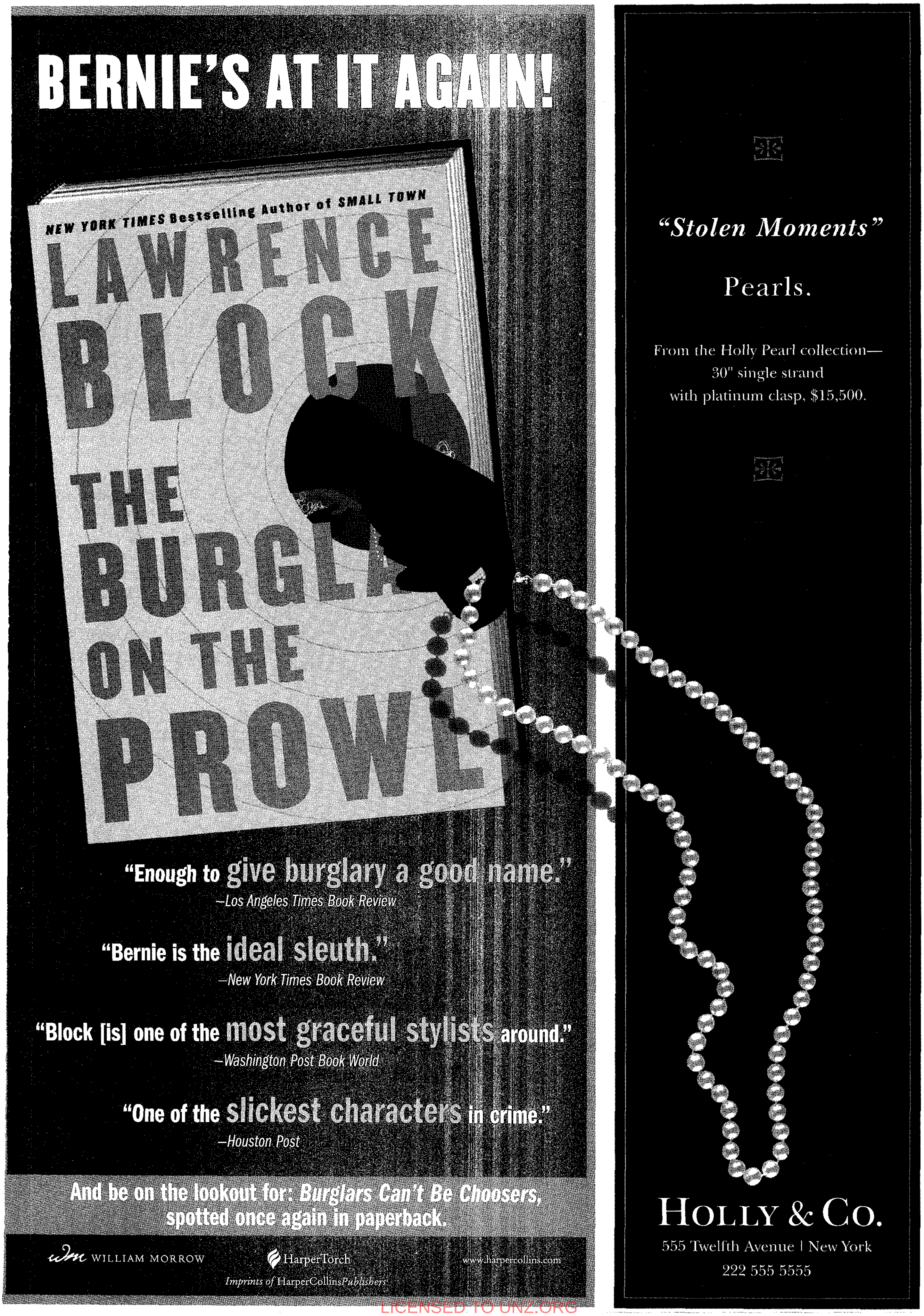
ABOVE AND BEYOND

PABLO NERUDA: A CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION
The Americas Society presents a two-day tribute to the Chilean poet. March 25 at 6:30: Marjorie Agosín, Martín Espada, and Soledad Fariña read selections of Neruda's verses, in both Spanish and English. The following night, also at 6:30, the translator and *New Yorker* contributor Alastair Reid talks about working with Neruda. (680 Park Ave., at 68th St. No tickets necessary.)

READINGS
March 25 at 6:30: Dave Eggers, Michael Cunningham, and Jhumpa Lahiri are among the dozen authors turning out for a benefit reading called "Where's My Democracy?" (The Great Hall, Cooper Union, 7 E. 7th St. For tickets and more information, visit www.downtownfordemocracy.org.) ♦ March 25 at 7: A variety of actors and authors read from the winning poems, plays, and stories from the thirtieth annual PEN Prison Writing Program; former winners will also be present. (The Riverside Church, 91 Claremont Ave., at 120th St. For more information, call 212-334-1660, ext. 117.) ♦ March 29 at 7: The poets Michael Ryan, Thomas Lux, and Spencer Reese read from their work. (Poets House, 72 Spring St. No tickets necessary.) ♦ March 29 at 8: The actors Kate Burton, Mary Beth Hurt, and David Strathairn present Anne Carson's new translation of Euripides' "Hecuba." (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500.)

TALKS
March 24 at 6:30: Craig Wilder discusses his contribution to the Brooklyn Historical Society's new exhibition "Brooklyn Works: 400 Years of Making a Living in Brooklyn." (Graduate Center, City University of New York, Fifth Ave. at 34th St. 212-817-8215.) ♦ March 25 at 7: The poet Lyn Hejinian discusses the life and work of the writer and activist George Oppen. (Poets House, 72 Spring St. No tickets necessary.) ♦ March 29 at 6:30: The Explorers Club screens two recently restored films, "Excavating Indian Pueblos at Chaco Canyon," from 1932, and "The Congo Peacock Expedition of 1937." David Hearst Thomas, of the American Museum of Natural History, will be on hand to discuss them. (46 E. 70th St. For more information, call 212-628-8383.)

TOUR
March 28 at 2: The South Street Seaport Museum offers a historical walking tour called "African American Life in Lower Manhattan." (For more information, call 212-748-8786.)



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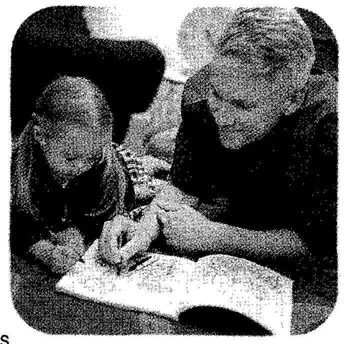

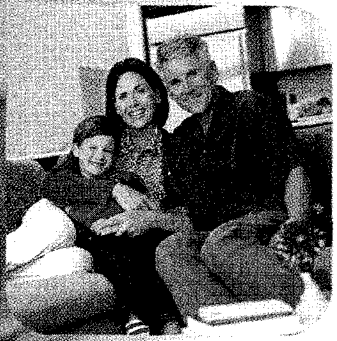

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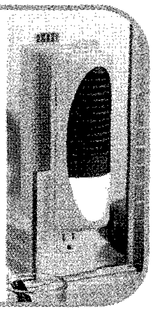

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MOVIES OPENING

DOGVILLE
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening March 26. (Angelika Film Center, 19th Street East 6, and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

JERSEY GIRL
Kevin Smith wrote and directed this drama about a Manhattan music promoter (Ben Affleck) who, after a family tragedy, moves with his young daughter (Raquel Castro) to his suburban New Jersey home town. The cast includes Liv Tyler, Jennifer Lopez, and George Carlin. Opening March 26.

THE LADYKILLERS
A remake of the 1955 comedy in which a group of thieves, led by a charlatan professor (Tom Hanks), board with a churchgoing old lady (Irma P. Hall) who discovers their heist plans. With Marlon Wayans and J. K. Simmons. Written and directed by Joel and Ethan Coen. Opening March 26.

NED KELLY
Gregor Jordan directed this bio-pic of the nineteenth-century Australian bank robber and folk hero (Heath Ledger). With Naomi Watts, Orlando Bloom, and Geoffrey Rush. Opening March 26.

NEVER DIE ALONE
DMX plays a gangster out for revenge in an adaptation of the Donald Goines novel. Directed by Ernest Dickerson. Opening March 26.

OSCAR SHORTS
The Best Animated Short winner, "Harvie Krumpet," and the live-action film "Squash," in which a man must defeat his boss on the court in order to keep his job, screen along with three other nominated films. Opening March 26. (Cinema Village.)

RAJA
A middle-aged Frenchman (Pascal Greggory) falls in love with a nineteen-year-old Moroccan girl (Najat Benssallem), in a romantic drama set in contemporary Marrakech. Jacques Doillon wrote and directed. In French and Arabic. Opening March 26. (Pioneer Theatre and Quad Cinema.)

SOUND
SCENE
TAKE
1
2
3
PROD
Etc...

SCOOBY-DOO 2: MONSTERS UNLEASHED
The meddling kids solve a new mystery, in a sequel based on the cartoon television show. The cast includes Freddie Prinze, Jr., Sarah Michelle Gellar, Matthew Lillard, Seth Green, and Alicia Silverstone. Directed by Raja Gosnell. Opening March 26.

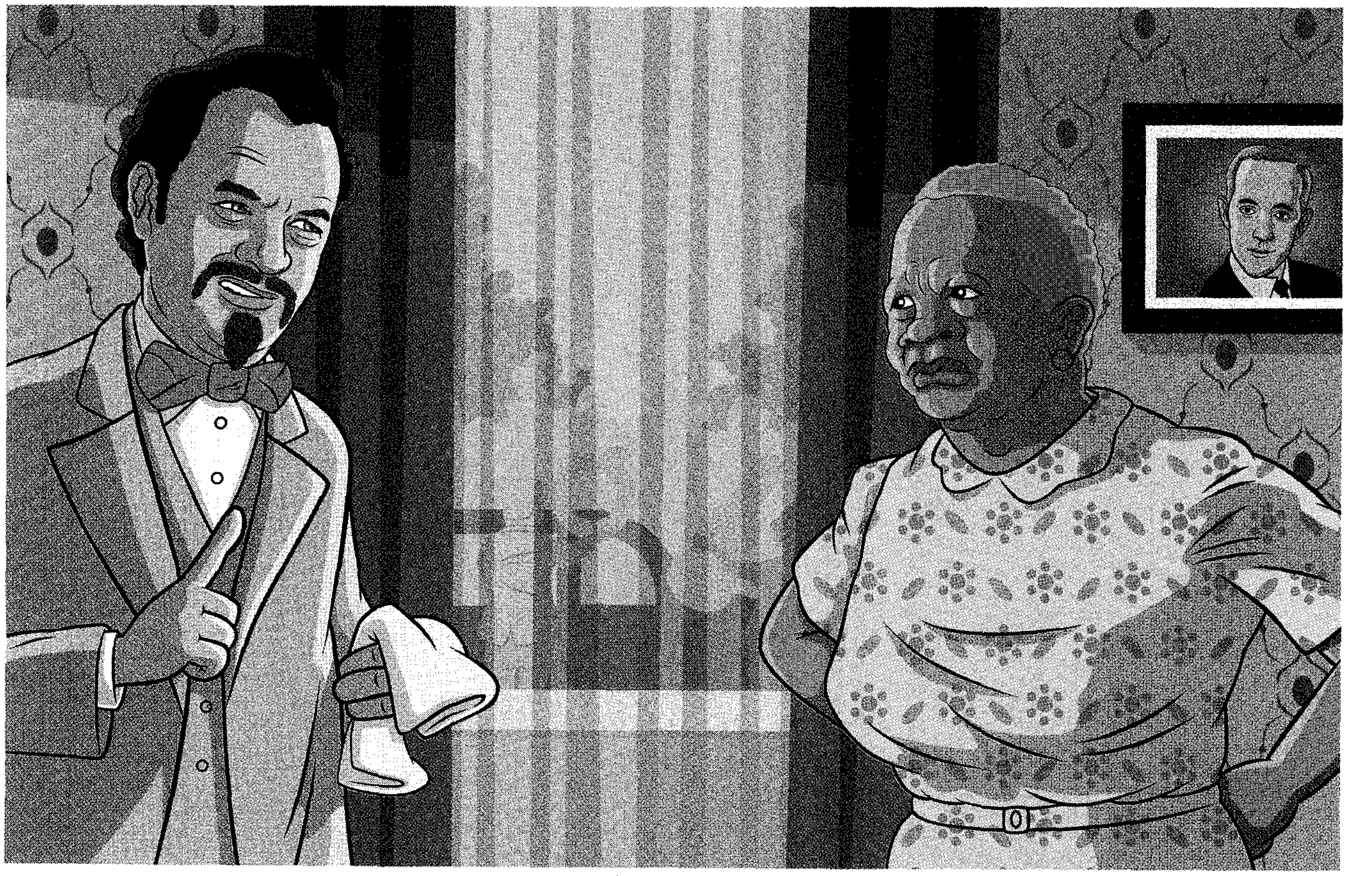
TWO MEN WENT TO WAR
A dramatic comedy set during the Second World War and based on the true story of two British Army dentists who launched an unauthorized attack on Occupied France. With Kenneth Cranham and Leo Bill. Directed by John Henderson. Opening March 26. (Angelika Film Center.)

FILM NOTES

BON VOYAGE
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (Paris.)

DISTANT
An award-winning, pulse-slowing picture from the Turkish writer and director Nuri Bilge Ceylan. It is the tale of two relatives, Yusuf (Mehmet Emin Toprak) and Mahmut (Muzaffer Özdemir); the former hitches a ride from the provinces to Istanbul, where he lodges with the latter and tries to find employment. It must be said that his powers of initiative, in this respect, are not great, and if he spent half as much time filling out job applications as he does wandering the city under feathery falls of snow, he would be earning serious money within days. The movie, however, profits from his strollings, for what intrigues Ceylan is not success, or good companionship, but the chilly drift of melancholia. The two men never click, and even the cosmopolitan Mahmut finds less comfort in his love life than in his secret stash of porn. Nobody will come out of this movie singing—you are more likely to emerge with a scowl, or with the need for a cigarette—but the sheer cussedness of the project has a grace and conviction of its own. In Turkish.—*Anthony Lane* (Reviewed in our issue of 3/15/04.) (Cinema Village.)

ETERNAL SUNSHINE OF THE SPOTLESS MIND
Yes, it's another attempt by the screenwriter Charlie Kaufman to replace the antique notion of cinema as persuasive entertainment with that of cinema as some strange, whirring device for the disorientation of the human brain. Jim Carrey plays Joel and Kate Winslet plays Clementine (and, yes, she has heard all the jokes), who fall in love and out of love and back in love again. Fair enough, but Kaufman and the director, Michel Gondry, run the whole story in rewind, as if to prove the Shakespearean theorem that journeys end in lovers' meeting. Just to complicate the issue, Tom Wilkinson plays a dodgy doctor who can, for a fee, wipe the memory of a chosen individual, adored or otherwise, from your mind—a treatment of which both Joel and Clementine avail themselves. The conceit writhes with implausibility, yet it also gives off flashes of high-tech, low-down beauty, as scenes of tenderness begin to go grievously blank before the sweethearts' eyes. Carrey's latest effort to elude, or at least refine, his looney persona is more sincere than convincing, and it is left to Winslet, at once fierce and footloose, to carry the show. On the eighth viewing, say, the damn thing might even make sense. With Mark Ruffalo, Elijah Wood, and a blissed-out Kirsten Dunst—what is she on?—*A.L.* (3/22/04)



MICHAEL WELDON

Tom Hanks as a courtly, loquacious con artist and Irma P. Hall as a wary Bible-thumper in "The Ladykillers," opening March 26.

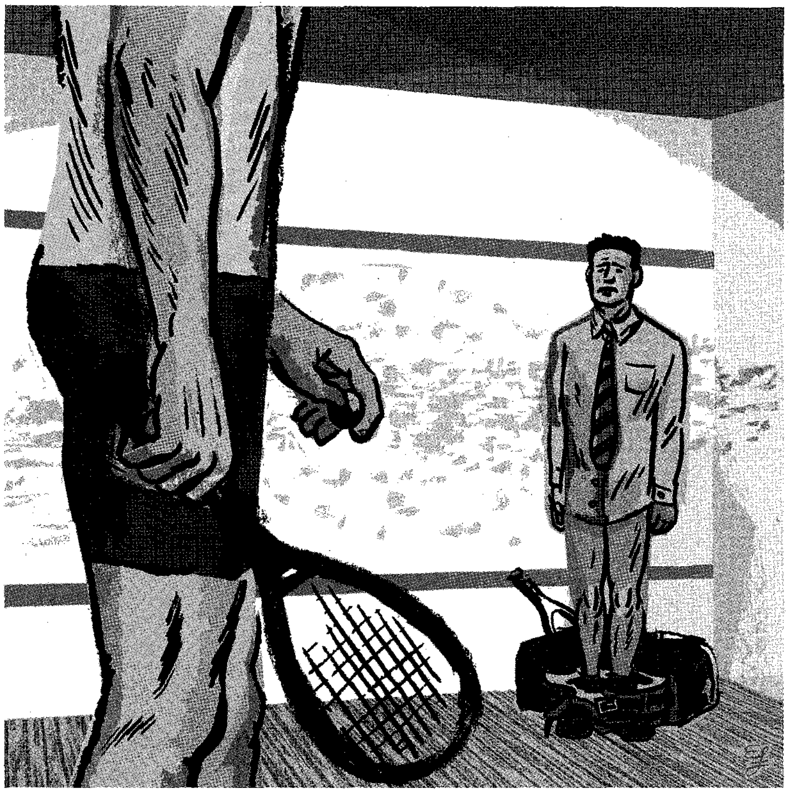
(BAM Rose Cinemas, Battery Park 11, Chelsea Cinemas, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Orpheum VII, 72nd Street East, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.)

FILMING OTHELLO

Orson Welles looks back at his brilliant 1952 film version of "Othello" in this modest 1978 documentary—the last film the director completed. It combines several revelations and a lot of charming fat-chewing. The strongest bit comes when Welles explains how the production's notorious bad luck catalyzed a remarkable theatrical coup: he staged Roderigo's death scene in a bathhouse because the costumes never arrived at his Moroccan location. But even when Welles and Micheál MacLiammóir (who played Iago) and Hilton Edwards (Brabantio) are simply sounding off around a phony-looking luncheon table (Welles obviously reshot his own part of the conversation), this movie has personality.—*Michael Sragow* (Film Forum; March 24.)

FISTS IN HIS POCKET

This first film by Marco Bellocchio (released in 1965) must surely be one of the most astonishing directorial débuts in the history of movies, yet it is hard to know how to react to it. The direction is exhilaratingly cool and assured, and the whole movie is charged with temperament, but the material is wild. It's about a bourgeois family of diseased monsters; epileptic fits multiply between bouts of matricide, fratricide, and incest. The material is so savage that the movie often seems intended to be funny, but *why* it was so intended isn't clear. It features the best strange-brother-and-sister act since "Les Enfants Terribles": Lou Castel, with his pug-dog manner, and Paola Pitagora, looking like a debauched gazelle. Cinematography by Alberto Marrama; music by Ennio Morricone. In Italian.—*Pauline Kael* (BAM Rose Cinemas; March 24.)



Lionel Baillius "Squash" screens as part of the "Oscar Shorts" series.

ERIK T. JOHNSON

GOOD BYE, LENIN!

Christiane (Katrin Sass), a saintly East German Communist, falls into a coma just before the Berlin Wall comes down, in 1989. When she awakens, her son, Alex (Daniel Brühl), creates a kind of ersatz reality for her—a living museum of Communism—in which nothing has changed. He gets his cranky sister and a group of embarrassed neighbors to take part in the charade, going so far as to work with a filmmaker buddy on fake news broadcasts about the unending triumphs of a regime that no longer exists. This social satire was directed by Wolfgang Becker, whose background is in TV, and the movie often plays like a series of television-comedy skits, some of them funny and incisive, some larkish and insubstantial. Yet beneath the slapstick surface lies a sombre German heart: the point of the fable is that Communism in Germany was always an ersatz reality—that for forty years Party leaders were creating a large-scale version of the fiction that Alex creates in his mother's bedroom. In German.—*David Denby* (3/8/04) (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

HIDALGO

The supposedly true tale of a man, Frank Hopkins, his horse, Hidalgo, and a three-thousand-mile endurance race across the Arabian desert in 1890. Viggo Mortensen, late of Middle Earth, gives an old-fashioned and gently sexy performance as Hopkins in this overlong but impressively mounted epic. The director, Joe Johnston, films the desert landscapes of Morocco with panoramic grandeur and wisely gives Hidalgo, a beautiful mustang, some major closeup time. And while the storytelling is choppy—the movie is saddled with a subplot designed to add some romance—the racing scenes are terrifically exciting, with plenty of Spielbergian obstacles (sandstorms, ambushes, quicksand) to keep all the Indy fans happy.—*Bruce Diones* (Battery Park 11, East 86th Street Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.)

OSAMA

The forty-one-year-old writer-director Siddiq Barmak, an Afghan film nut who never recovered from seeing "Lawrence of Arabia" as a boy, has gifts of vision and temperament equal to those of the finest directors now working. This lovely movie, the first feature to come out of Afghanistan since the fall of the Taliban, is about a twelve-year-old girl (Marina Golbahari) who dresses as a boy in order to get work and winds up with dozens of prepubescent boys in a madrassa, where she is subjected to nonstop Koranic recitation and bizarre lectures about sex. The movie is deeply shocking and understated, with an iconic use of such repeated imagery as the shots of men slowly keying elaborate locks that pen the women up. The groups of faceless women in their burkas are like fields of lavender swaying in the wind; the boys in their white turbans bobbing over the Koran are both beautiful and forbidding. Made for less than fifty thousand dollars (plus free use of camera and crew), the movie is an outright miracle. In Dari and Pashto.—*D.D.* (3/8/04) (BAM Rose Cinemas, Empire 25, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Union Square.)

THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST

Mel Gibson's bloody re-creation of the last twelve hours in the life of Jesus is one of the cruellest movies in the history of the cinema. Gibson and the screenwriter Benedict Fitzgerald selected and enhanced incidents from the four Gospels and collated them into a single, surpassingly violent narrative in which the incomparable glories of Jesus' temperament—the joyousness, the brilliance, the eloquence—are all but effaced by the spectacle of his physical destruction. The lashing and flaying, often in slow-motion, go on forever, and Gibson displays a curious technical fascination with the details of crucifixion—huge nails being hammered into hands and feet, with James Caviezel's Jesus howling at each blow. Here and there, the movie has a kind of grim power, and Caleb Deschanel's even gray lighting at the Crucifixion is stunning, but this is a sickening, unilluminating, and ignorant show. The filmmakers have also changed in small ways a number of things from the Gospels and ignored what historians know of ancient Judea, all with the result of making the Jewish leaders more, and the Roman leaders less, responsible for the death of Jesus. It's a deeply angry film, and one wonders how believers can react to it with anything but guilt, fear, or loathing.—*D.D.* (3/1/04) (Battery Park 11, Chelsea West, East 86th Street Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Metro Twin, 64th and 2nd, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.)

THE RETURN

This first feature by Andrei Zvyagintsev has the startling, irrepressible quality of the best débuts. A pair of brothers, young Ivan (Ivan Dobronravov) and the teenage Andrey (Vladimir Garin), live peacefully in a fatherless household in a brackish backwater of what used to be the Soviet Union. In the midst of an idle summer, their father (Konstantin Lavronenko) turns up from nowhere and starts, with minimum benevolence, to reëstablish his authority. Andrey responds well to such tyranny, while Ivan, a mother's boy, glowers at the treacherous interloper. Most of the film takes place on a fishing trip, which ripples with threat and thrill alike; we know that it cannot end well for father and sons, but we hardly dare to wonder what form the calamity will take. Zvyagintsev gets formidable concentration from his youthful actors, and his storytelling moves with the simplicity—calm, chiselled, and suggestive—of a fable. In Russian.—*A.L.* (3/15/04) (Cinema Village.)

SECRET WINDOW

Johnny Depp squanders his newfound multiplex stardom in this "Misery"-lite Stephen King adaptation about a writer and a psychotic maniac (John Turturro) who accuses him of plagiarism. The director, David Koepp, frames most of the action (or, more correctly, the inaction) inside a secluded cabin in upstate New York. His agile camerawork evokes the necessary claustrophobia, but the movie is lethargic, with weak plot turns and dialogue that rarely pops. It may be the most pedestrian movie that Depp has ever done.—*B.D.* (Battery Park 11, Beekman, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Village Theatre VII.)

SPARTAN

Mamet in zero gravity. Scene by scene, the writer-director's new movie plays with a spitting intensity, but nothing anyone does has the natural movement of life. The characters seem propelled by the logic of film noir: save the girl, avenge the partner, don't turn on the lights. Val Kilmer plays a military specialist investigating the disappearance of a government official's daughter. The official is probably the President, although the movie is coy about that fact, thereby avoiding any real-world political fallout. Kilmer, who, at times, looks very "Iceman," has the most fun with Mamet's machine-gun dialogue. Along with his protégé (Derek Luke), he uncovers a non-P.C. blond-girl smuggling ring run by Arabs. A few double crosses later, the movie presents the cynical premise that a politician would sacrifice his daughter's life to preserve his chances for reëlection. Even the Grassy Knoll crowd will have trouble swallowing that one.—*Michael Agger* (East

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86th Street Cinemas, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, 64th and 2nd, and Village Theatre VII.)

STARSKY & HUTCH
The comedic teammates Owen Wilson and Ben Stiller send up one of the hallmark buddy-cop shows of the seventies. This was a fresh idea nine years ago when Spike Jonze and the Beastie Boys did it in the video for "Sabotage"; five minutes of ridiculous rooftop jumps and freeze-frame double takes are about all you need before the joke gets old. Still, Wilson and Stiller have an appealing, casual chemistry (as they did in "Zoolander"), and some of the scenes go in unexpected directions. For period detail, the 1974 Ford Gran Torino takes center stage, but cheers to the prop master who found the vintage rubber slingshot. Directed by Todd Phillips, who can't get enough of seventies television: his next announced project is an adaptation of "The Six Million Dollar Man."—*M.A.* (Astor Plaza, Battery Park 11, Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema 1, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Metro Twin, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.)

THE TRIAL
Orson Welles's theatricality and bravado would seem to be especially unsuited to the matter-of-fact comic horror of the Kafka novel, but he manages some striking effects that aren't at all jarring. This little-seen 1962 film has effective passages; it's more than an honorable try, though the hollow sound (that is, of the English-language version) is sometimes off-putting. With Anthony Perkins, Jeanne Moreau, Romy Schneider, Akim Tamiroff, Fernand Ledoux, Elsa Martinelli, Jess Hahn, Suzanne Flon, Madeleine Robinson, Michel Lonsdale, and Welles.—*P.K.* (Film Forum; March 26-28.)

WILBUR WANTS TO KILL HIMSELF
The first English-language picture by the director Lone Scherfig ("Italian for Beginners") is a tempo-shifting drama, comedic and melodramatic, about two Scottish brothers. The elder is a self-sacrificing bookseller (Adrian Rawlins) and the younger a hostile, suicidal loner (Jamie Sives). When a sprightly, mysterious single mom (captivatingly played by Shirley Henderson) enters their lives, romantic complications and near-death experiences, intentional and not, help them all find strength and purpose. It's an odd, winding tale, and, although some scenes can be mawkish, the performances are multifaceted and ultimately moving.—*B.D.* (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

ALSO PLAYING

THE BARBARIAN INVASIONS (11/24/03)
First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, and Sunshine Cinema.

DAWN OF THE DEAD
Battery Park 11, Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.

THE DREAMERS (2/9/04)
Chelsea Cinemas, Empire 25, and Sunshine Cinema.

THE FOG OF WAR
Angelika Film Center, BAM Rose Cinemas, Empire 25, and 62nd & Broadway.

GREENDALE
Sunshine Cinema.

INTERMISSION
First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Square, and Village Theatre VII.

NOI
Angelika Film Center.

TOUCHING THE VOID (1/19/04)
Empire 25, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Sunshine Cinema.

THEATRE ADDRESSES

Unless noted, call 212-777-FILM for show times.

Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St.
Astor Plaza, 44th St. at Broadway.
Battery Park 11, West St. at Vesey St.
Beekman, Second Ave. at 66th St.
Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd St.
Chelsea West, 333 W. 23rd St.
Cinema Classics, 332 E. 11th St. (212-677-6309).
Cinemas 1, 2, and 3, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St. (212-924-3363).
East 86th Street Cinemas, Third Ave. at 86th St.
84th Street Sixplex, Broadway at 84th St.
Empire 25, on 42nd St. near Eighth Ave. (212-398-3939).
First & 62nd Cinemas, 400 E. 62nd St.
42nd Street E Walk, 42nd St. near Eighth Ave.
Kips Bay Theatre, Second Ave. at 32nd St.
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Broadway at 63rd St. (212-757-2280).
Lincoln Square, Broadway at 68th St.
Metro Twin, Broadway at 99th St.
New York Twin, Second Ave. at 66th St.
19th Street East 6, Broadway at 19th St.
Orpheum VII, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Paris, 4 W. 58th St. (212-688-3800).
Pioneer Theatre, 155 E. 3rd St. (212-254-3300).
Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th St.
72nd Street East, Third Ave. at 71st St.
64th and 2nd, Second Ave. at 64th St.
62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd St.
Sunshine Cinema, 139-143 E. Houston St.
Sutton 1 and 2, Third Ave. at 57th St.
34th Street Theatre, 312 W. 34th St.
Union Square, Broadway at 13th St.
Village East Cinemas, Second Ave. at 12th St.
Village Theatre VII, Third Ave. at 11th St.
Ziegfeld, 141 W. 54th St.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—World-cinema Fridays. March 26 at 7:30: "Princess Blade" (2002, Shinsuke Sato; in Japanese). ♦ Through March 28: A Lars Von Trier retrospective. March 27 at 1: "Zentropa" (1991; in English and German). ♦ March 27 at 3:30: "Dancer in the Dark" (2000). ♦ March 27 at 6:30 and March 28 at 6:45: "Breaking the Waves" (1996). ♦ March 28 at 1: "The Humiliated" (1998, Jesper Jargil; in Danish). ♦ March 28 at 3: "The Idiots" (1998; in Danish). ♦ March 28 at 5:15: "The Purified" (2002, Jargil; in Danish).

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5110)—Through March 29: A Boris Barnet retrospective. Unless otherwise noted, all films are in Russian. March 24 at 7 and March 27 at 9: "The Girl with the Hat Box" (1927; silent). ♦ March 24 at 9 and March 28 at 3: "The House on Trubnaya Square" (1928; silent). ♦ March 25 at 7 and March 28 at 5: "Okraina" (1933). ♦ March 25 at 9 and March 28 at 7: "By the Bluest of Seas" (1936). ♦ March 27 at 3 and March 28 at 9: "Dark Is the Night" (1945). ♦ March 27 at 5 and March 29 at 7: "Bountiful Summer" (1951). ♦ March 27 at 7 and March 29 at 9: "Alenka" (1961). ♦ Through March 28: "James Benning: The California Trilogy." March 27-28 at 4: "El Valley Centro" (1999). ♦ March 27-28 at 6: "Los" (2000). ♦ March 27-28 at 8: "Sogobi" (2001).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-777-3456)—A tribute to the director Marco Bellocchio. All films are in Italian. March 24 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "Fists in His Pocket" (†). ♦ March 25 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "The Conviction" (1990). ♦ March 26 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "The Prince of Homburg" (1997). ♦ March 27 at 7: "Good Morning, Night" (2003). ♦ March 28 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "The Nanny" (1999). ♦ British horror films. March 29 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "The Stranglers of Bombay" (1959, Terence Fisher). ♦ March 30 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "Scream of Fear" (1960, Seth Holt).

FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—Through April 15: An Orson Welles retrospective. March 24 at 1, 4:35, and 8:10: "Filming Othello" (†). ♦ March 24 at 2:50, 6:25, and 10: "It's All True" (1993, Richard Wilson, Myron Miesel, and Bill Krohn). ♦ March 26-28 at 1:20, 5:25, and 9:30: "Mr. Arkadin (Confidential Report)" (1955, Welles). ♦ March 26-28 at 3:10 and 7:15: "The Trial" (†). ♦ March 29 at 1:20, 5:20, and 9:20: "A Safe Place" (1971, Henry Jaglom). ♦ March 29 at 3:10 and 7:10: "Someone to Love" (1987, Jaglom). ♦ March 30 at 2:30, 5:45, and 9: "Rosabella: Orson Welles in Italy" (1993, Gianfranco Giagni and Ciro Giorgini). ♦ March 30 at 3:45 and 7: "The Dominici Affair" (1999, Christophe Cognet). ♦ Through April 8: Columbia 3-D Thursdays. March 25 at 2:15, 5:40, and 9:05: "Jesse James vs. the Daltons" (1954, William Castle). ♦ March 25 at 3:55 and 7:20: "Fort Ti" (1953, Castle).

FLORENCE GOULD HALL
55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—Through March 30: A tribute to the French studio Pathé. March 30 at 12:30 and 6:30: "Belphégor" (1969, Claude Barma; in French).

GRAMERCY THEATRE
127 E. 23rd St. (212-777-4900)—Through March 24: "Pacific Street Films: 35th Anniversary Salute." March 24 at 6: "Red Squad" (1971, Howard Blatt, Steven Fischler, et al.) and two other documentaries. ♦ Recent acquisitions. March 24 at 8:15: "The Man Who Wasn't There" (2001, Joel and Ethan Coen). ♦ March 25 at 2: "Election" (1999, Alexander Payne). ♦ March 25 at 4 and March 29 at 6: "Black Tape: The Videotape Fariborz Kamkari Found in the Garbage" (2002, Fariborz Kamkari; in Farsi). ♦ March 26 at 2: "An-Magritt" (1969, Arne Skouen; in Norwegian). ♦ March 26 at 4: "Body Double X" (1998-2000, Brice Dellsperger; in French). ♦ March 29 at 8: "Family Nest" (1977, Béla Tarr; in Hungarian).

SUNSHINE CINEMA
139-143 E. Houston St. (212-358-0573)—Midnight movies. March 26-27: "Fight Club" (1999, David Fincher).

THALIA THEATRE
Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. (212-864-5400)—March 27 at 6: "The Land Where the Blues Began" (1978, Alan Lomax). ♦ March 27 at 8: "The Harder They Come" (1973, Perry Henzell). ♦ March 27 at 10: "Rebel Music: The Bob Marley Story" (2000, Jeremy Marre). ♦ March 28 at 2, 4, 6, and 8: "Modern Times" (1936, Charles Chaplin).

WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (212-875-5600)—Through April 4: "New Directors/New Films." Screenings will be held at Walter Reade Theatre, Alice Tully Hall, and the Gramercy Theatre. See www.filmlinc.com for venues. March 24 at 8 and March 25 at 6: "Everyday People" (2003, Jim McKay). ♦ March 25 at 6, March 27 at 3:30, and March 28 at 8:45: "Strong Shoulders" (2003, Ursula Meier; in French). ♦ March 25 at 8:30, March 26 at 6, and March 27 at 3:30: "The Middle of the World" (2003, Vicente Amorim; in Portuguese). ♦ March 25 at 8:30, March 27 at 6, and March 28 at 1: "In Your Hands" (2004, Annette Olesen; in Danish). ♦ March 26 at 6 and March 27 at 12:30: "The Story of the Weeping Camel" (2003, Byambasuren Davaa and Luigi Falorni; in Mongolian). ♦ March 26 at 8:30 and March 27 at 6: "Seducing Doctor Lewis" (2003, Jean-François Pouliot; in French). ♦ March 26 at 8:30 and March 28 at 12:30: "Dig!" (2004, Ondi Timoner). ♦ March 27 at 1 and 9 and March 28 at 9: "Eager Bodies" (2003, Xavier Giannoli; in French). ♦ March 27 at 3 and March 28 at 6: "Fuse" (2003, Pjer Zalica; in Serbo-Croatian). ♦ March 27 at 6, March 28 at 3:15, and March 30 at 8:30: "B-Happy" (2003, Gonzalo Justiniano; in Spanish). ♦ March 27 at 9 and March 28 at 6: "Captive" (2003, Gaston Biraben; in Spanish). ♦ March 27 at 9 and March 28 at 3:45: "No. 17" (2003, David Ofek; in Hebrew). ♦ March 29 at 6: "Three Step Dancing" (2003, Salvatore Mereu; in Sardinian). ♦ March 29 at 8:45: "Untold Scandal" (2003, E J-yong; in Korean). ♦ March 30 at 6: "Silent Waters" (2003, Sabiha Sumar; in Urdu and Punjabi).

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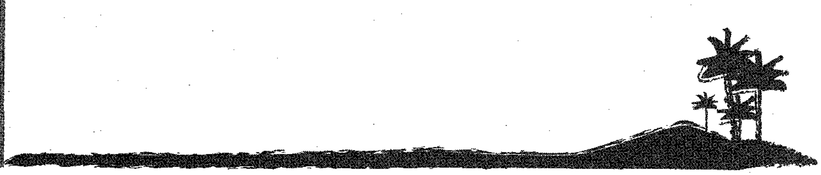

Heaven Can Wait

by Joe Yogerst

No single island speaks for the whole Caribbean. Each of the thirty-odd nation states and territories basking in this seductive sea is a world unto itself. That, in essence, is what keeps me coming back. A checkered history—colonial powers vying for geopolitical advantage, aristocrats belting it out with buccaneers on the high seas, the African diaspora, the hard won struggles for independence—has fostered the rich diversity we now take for granted. Extravagant beauty, culinary creativity, artistic brilliance, and soul-riveting rhythms come in liberal doses throughout these luscious isles. But after two decades of wandering the Caribbean, I've discovered only one constant—there is no "typical" destination that's emblematic of this multicultural mosaic.

One island flaunts many personas. In more than a dozen visits to **Jamaica**, I've always stumbled upon something new and intriguing. Kingston is the place for anyone who wants to explore the island's rich musical heritage. So the last time I was there, I visited the waterfront and a neighborhood called Rae Town, where they've been throwing Sunday night street parties for as long as anyone can remember. Hundreds of people were clad in outrageous threads. And with an ice-cold beer in hand, I settled in for an evening of old-school reggae—Desmond Dekker, Peter Tosh, and early Bob Marley—the likes of which never made the airwaves back home. An altogether enchanted evening in a part of Jamaica that hasn't lost its edge.

> "If Hemingway were alive, *this* is where he would cast his line and probably where he'd learn to dive."

On an earlier trip, I discovered Frenchman's Cove, a sliver of paradise that's a few miles east of Port Antonio—in my estimation, the planet's perfect beach. The crescent of fine white sand and turquoise water is protected by densely wooded headlands and fed by a crystal-clear stream with tropical flowers growing along its banks. A short drive down the coast is Boston Bay, where the beachside shacks are redolent with peppery jerk cooking. And then there's superbly scenic Montego or Mo' Bay where, after snorkeling in the underwater coral gardens of Doctor's Cave, you can luxuriate at a Georgian-style great house. A short drive south through the rural countryside, the eccentric Seaford Town in Westmoreland Parish is populated by the descendants of nineteenth-century Germans who were brought to Jamaica as indentured servants by the British.

Jamaica surprised me again last year. At the tail end of what was basically a "sun, sand and seas" vacation, I ducked down to Treasure Beach for the annual Calabash Festival. Billed as a literary gathering, the free Memorial Day weekend event was much more than prose. A huge, billowing tent had been set up in a goat pasture beside the sea, and jumbled together with the book readings were slam poetry, standup comics, performance art, open mics, and Jamaican music that went back fifty years.

Even among the smaller Caribbean landfalls, the diversity is astonishing. Dutch-speaking **Curaçao** is like a Van Gogh with a tropical twist. In Willemstad, pastel colonial buildings with gabled roofs are set along canals that by day reflect the schooners that flit over from South America and by night mirror the island's brilliant canopy of stars. There are some elegantly preserved countryside plantations, and a remarkable Willemstad synagogue built in 1732 is still in operation. Curaçao Underwater Park on the Atlantic or leeward side of the island preserves more than twelve miles of stunning coral reef; and scuba divers and snorkelers also flock to popular dive sites such as Grote Knip and Kleine Knip along the northwest coast.

The **Dominican Republic** also defies glib, sound-bite descriptions. Sprawling across the eastern half of Hispanola, the nation that gave us Sammy Sosa and merengue is endowed with a thousand miles of vivid beaches. The twenty-mile strand of Punta Cana is like talcum powder while the sea is a memorable aquamarine. And the waters to the north of Samaná Peninsula are renowned for being humpback whale breeding and calving grounds. The Silver Bank shoals in Puerto Plata is where vestiges of pirate booty from the ill-fated Spanish galleon, the Concepción, remains undiscovered. Away from the coast, rugged cordillera culminates in ten-thousand-foot Pico Duarte, the Caribbean's highest mountain and a popular place for trekking on foot or by donkey.

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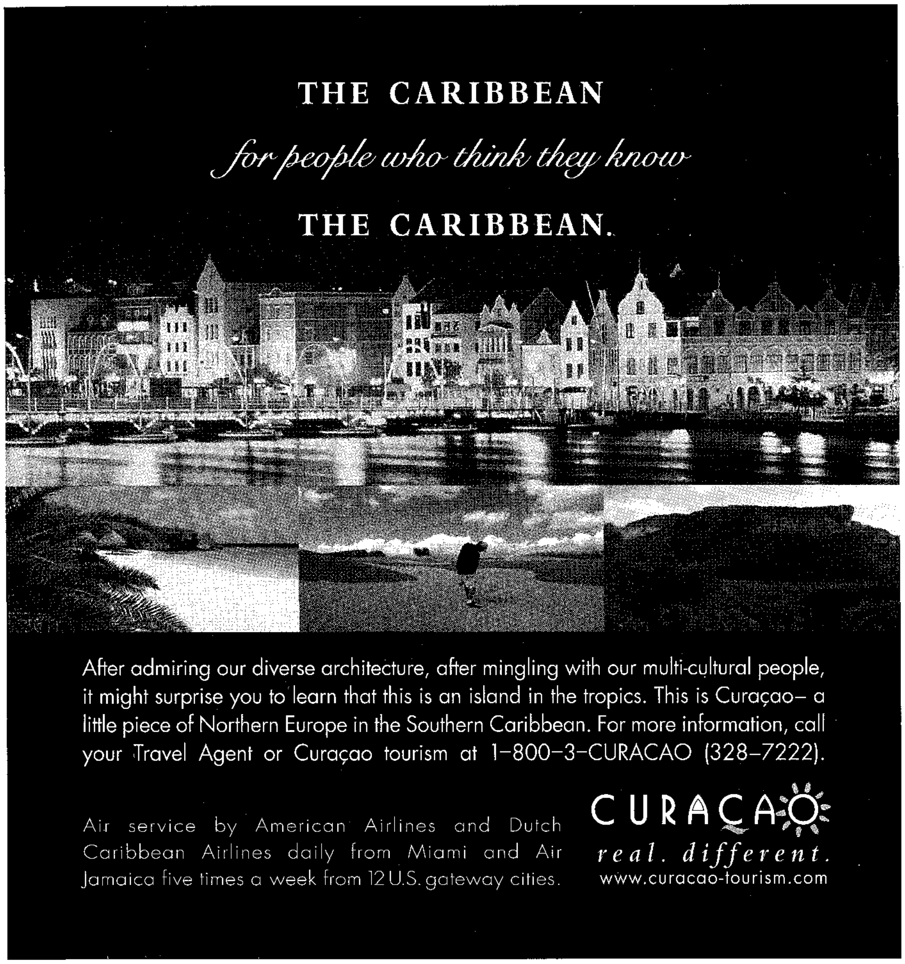
A favorite scuba and snorkeling spot of mine—the wreck of the RMS Rhone, a three-hundred-foot British mail steamer that went down in the hurricane of 1867—is situated at the bottom of Sir Francis Drake Channel near Salt Island off Tortola in the **British Virgin Islands**. Further up the archipelago is the **U.S. Virgin Islands**, and the three main Virgins could not be more different. Accessible by boat only, St. John remains wild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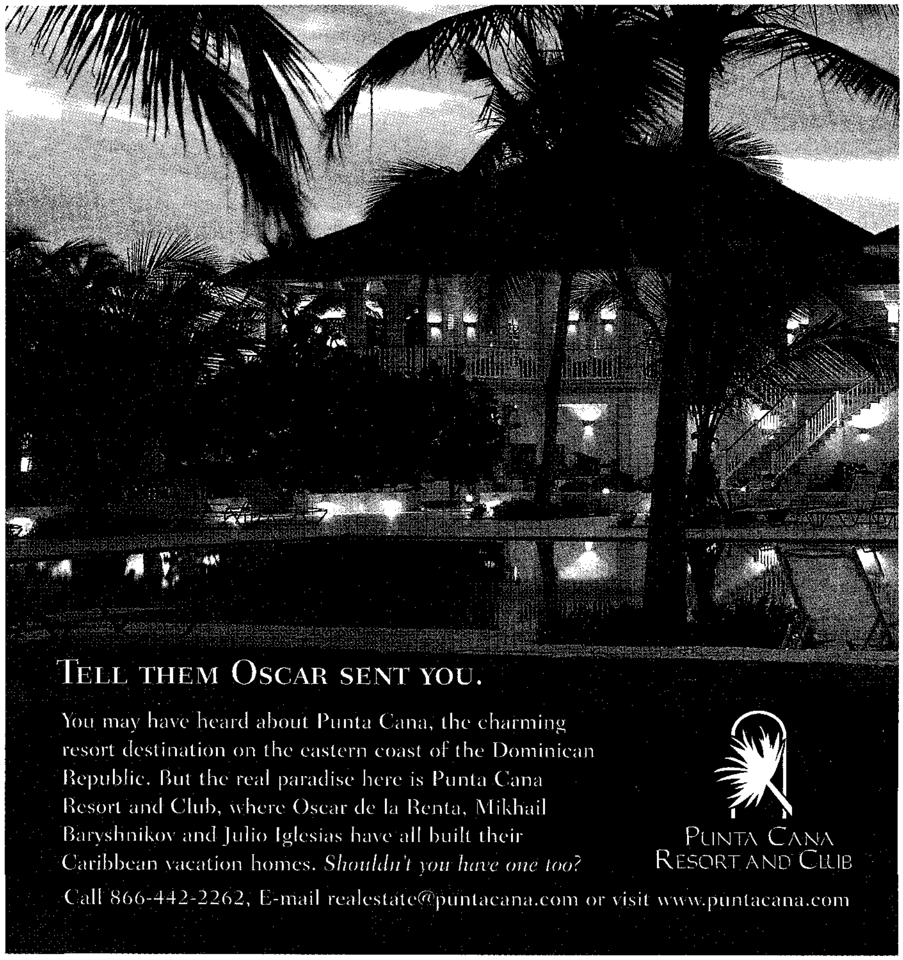
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and rugged in contrast to quiet and unassuming St. Croix, which retains its Danish colonial and early plantation feel. St. Thomas, on the other hand, with Blackbeard lore aplenty, is the region's great party isle and offers no shortage of shopping and nightlife in its Charlotte Amalie district. History buffs will also want to reserve time to visit seventeenth-century Fort Christian.

With its bougainvillea and baguettes, whitewashed villas and Foreign Legion forts, clothing-optional beaches and rowdy waterfront bars, **Martinique** offers a slice of the French Riviera. History buffs and curiosity seekers are lured to the eerie ruins of St-Pierre (or Little Pompeii)—known as the "Paris of the Caribbean" before it was destroyed by the eruption of the now-dormant Mt. Pelée in 1902. In contrast, **Antigua**, though independent for more than twenty years, remains thoroughly British. Cricket, warm beer, and high tea are still part and parcel of the local culture despite decades of independence. The restored Georgian-era Nelson's Dockyard in English Harbour is a must-see, as Antigua remains a sailing hub, with both bareboat and crewed yachts available for charter.

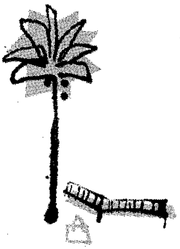
Conveniently located minutes by air from a number of Florida gateway cities, Grand Bahama Island in the easy-access **Islands of the Bahamas** is another idyllic place to unfurl a canvas. With more than thirty populated Out Islands (including Eleuthera, Grand Exuma, the Abacos, and Cat Island), visitors are bound to discover an empty beach, bountiful fishing ground, or virgin reef to explore. A total of seven hundred Bahamian islands are strewn across an area the size of New England, and if Hemingway were alive, no doubt *this* is where he would cast his line and probably where he'd learn to dive.

Exclusive "private island" resorts in the widely scattered Grenadines are especially attractive to those who crave extreme comfort and seclusion. The archipelago includes celebrated landfalls like Mustique, Petit St. Vincent, and Palm, where rock stars and royals are known to frolic. Nearby, seductive **St. Lucia** is graced with extraordinary natural beauty. Awesome gold and black-sand beaches, hot springs, and underwater sports have made it the honeymoon hub of the Caribbean. Nobel-prize winning poet Derek Walcott, who hails from the island, has a downtown Castries square named in his honor. Film buffs can plan a romantic day trip aboard the twin-masted Brig Unicorn, which served as Captain Jack Sparrow's flagship in "Pirates of the Caribbean."

Extremely green **Dominica** is one of the best places I know to experience nature in its raw and unencumbered state. Rain forest still covers two-thirds of the island, and it's protected by the Caribbean's most extensive national park system. Hiking and bird-watching opportunities abound, and Dominica overflows with rivers—one for each day of the year—and probably twice that many waterfalls. Throw in moderate prices, friendly locals, inventive food, and close encounters of the whale kind and you've got most of the ingredients for tropical nirvana.

But then again, any corner of the Caribbean could be someone's dream come true. Pick a paradise or, like me, return again and again to savor them all.

San Diego-based Joe Yogerst is a freelance writer. Additional reporting provided by Brian Berger. Illustrations by Robert Roth.



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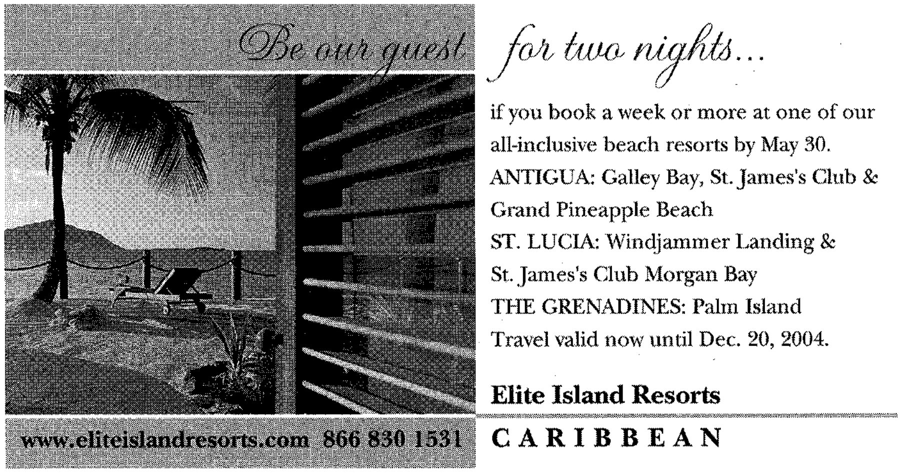

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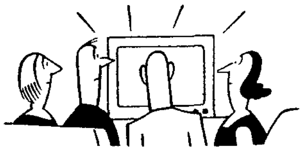
THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
AFTER MADRID



In less than a decade, the stateless soldiers of Al Qaeda, to say nothing of the many cells of like-minded yet unaligned fanatics hoping to die in assaults against liberal democracy, have changed the rules of global politics. Exploiting little more than crude weapons and the fluidity of contemporary life, they have waged an episodic war without borders: they have devastated embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, blown a hole through the U.S.S. Cole, and flown airplanes loaded with passengers into the World Trade towers and the Pentagon; they have bombed synagogues in Tunisia and Turkey, mosques in Baghdad and Karbala, a night club in Bali, apartment complexes and military barracks in Saudi Arabia, and, three days before a national election in Spain, commuter trains in Madrid.

The death toll is in the thousands. The statistics of carnage, however, are only a small part of terror's achievement. Al Qaeda and its ideological tributaries have aggravated animosities among governments in Europe and the United States and threatened the structures of mainstream Islam. The attacks have also afflicted countless cities with a need for hyper-vigilance and a sense of dread, to the degree where, in our daily lives, we conflate "dirty bomb" with "rush hour" and "midtown."

In recent years, Osama bin Laden has concealed his person from spies and Predator drones but has hidden his intentions and his sense of historical mission in plain sight. The recent bombings in Madrid are linked not only to the goals of undermining and unnerving states where secular pluralism reigns but also, by way of a kind of magical realism, to ancient resentments and fantasies, to bin Laden's desire, expressed in videotaped speeches and declarations, that his followers reverse what Al Qaeda's ideologist Ayman al-Zawahiri once called "the tragedy of Al-Andalus." In the United States, "The Moor's Last Sigh" is a novel by Salman Rushdie; for radical Islamists it is the memory of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella expelling Muslims from the Iberian peninsula and of King Boabdil fleeing Granada in tears while his mother says, "Do not weep like a woman for what you could not defend like a man." That event, five centuries past, resonates in the fundamentalist imagination like the defeat of the Muslim armies in Vienna in 1683 and the end of the Ottoman caliphate in 1924.

In the hours and days following the bombings in Madrid, contemporary society—its commentators, politicians, and voters—processed the crime mainly in the most contemporary way: as a tragedy and then as an election story. The ruling conservative party, which was leading narrowly in the polls, despite having made the unpopular move of sending a small contingent of troops to Iraq, seemed to prevaricate about the evidence for political advantage. It refused to recognize the signs of an Al Qaeda-style operation—the high level of coördination and sophistication of the attack, the claims of responsibility, the discovery of a van carrying detonators and a tape with verses of the Koran—and suggested, instead, that the bombings were the work of the Basque separatist group, ETA. The conservative Prime Minister, José María Aznar, telephoned *El País* and other Spanish news outlets to insist that it was ETA; his diplomats worked overtime to push a resolution through the U.N. Security Council blaming ETA; the Interior Minister, Ángel Acebes, denounced any speculation that Al Qaeda might have been involved as

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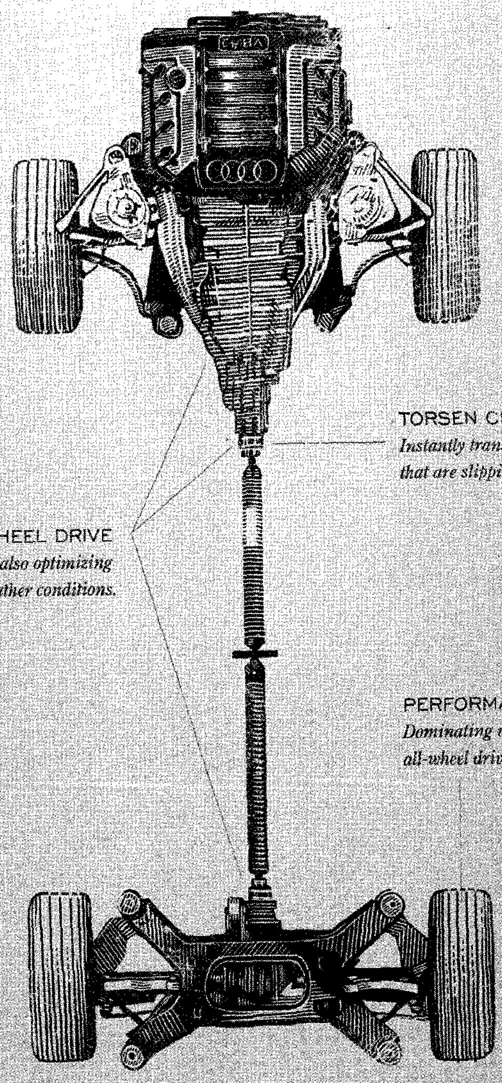
ANATOMY *of* A GENIUS

THE FOOT



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"an attempt by malicious people to distort information." And yet, as Keith B. Richburg, of the Washington *Post,* reported, the Spanish intelligence agency suspected Al Qaeda from the beginning.

When the Socialists won, voices ranging from the Speaker of the House, J. Dennis Hastert, to Thomas L. Friedman, of the *Times,* used the word "appeasement" to describe the Spanish electorate. Some of the commentary on the European left was just as simplistic. "We need to get beyond them and us, the good guys and the bad guys, and seek a genuinely collective response," an editorial in the *Guardian* declared. And what would that response be? Stepped-up joint intelligence or even military operations against Al Qaeda? Not quite. Better to hold "an international conference to bridge the divide between Muslim and Christian communities."

There were doubtless some Spanish voters who changed their vote in the naïve hope that a new, anti-Bush policy would protect them from further tragedy. But the Spanish reaction cannot be dismissed simply as appeasement. Although ninety per cent of Spaniards opposed sending troops to Iraq, the Socialists hardly won ninety per cent of the vote. The slight but decisive turn in the polls reflected something more complicated: a heightened resentment at the Aznar government's seeming willingness to mislead the public in order to exploit an act of terror for political advantage.

Sound familiar? The Bush Administration, which had expected an easy reelection campaign just as surely as it expected rose petals on the road to Baghdad, is now, in slow motion, coping with the same sin. The Administration's manipulation of intelligence about the presence—or absence—of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, along with its persistent efforts to link Saddam and September 11th, has led to distrust among both those who opposed the war from the start and those who were persuaded that military action was necessary in the face of what was described as an imminent threat. This goes for some members of the "coalition of the willing," too. Last week, the Polish President, Aleksander Kwasniewski, said that, while he felt that Iraq without Saddam Hussein is a "truly better Iraq," he also felt "uncomfortable due to the fact that we were misled with the information on weapons of mass destruction." The travails of present-day Iraq illustrate the perils not just of deception but of self-deception.

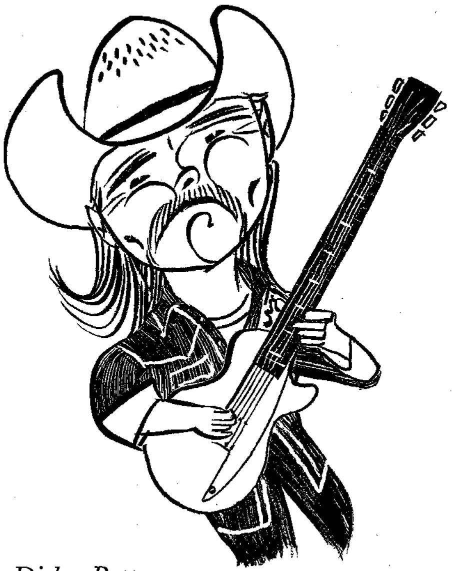
The problem of modern terror—terror that combines an apocalyptic ideology and a yearning for destruction—demands honesty with ourselves about the nature of the threat and honesty in politics. Capturing the top leaders of Al Qaeda is a necessity, but terror is not a threat that will end with decapitation. Nor will it end with the ordinary politics of negotiation and concession. The rebel cells of Madrid will not disperse with the pullout of Spanish troops from Iraq any more than the cells in this country dispersed with the American pullout of troops from Saudi Arabia. The old models do not apply. Groups like ETA and the I.R.A. have committed acts of repugnant violence, but their aims have always been regional, limited in scope. The radical Islamists are at war with modernity itself. Their sense of difference is encapsulated in the declaration of an alleged Al Qaeda spokesman: "You love life, and we love death." Transnational terror cannot be combatted in an atmosphere of international distrust. At the very least, the terrorists have proved themselves to be as good as their word. Governments that hope to resist them must be, too.

—*David Remnick*

ON THE CLOCK

JAM OFF

The producers of awards shows tend to be anxious about time: performers and presenters are urged not to squander it, in the interest of keeping to a TV schedule. You wouldn't think that the Jammys would share this concern. For one thing, they are not televised. For another, they involve a genre of music that does not typically submit to the constraints of the clock. The Jammys are the jam-band equivalent of the Grammys; jam bands may or may not rock, but, at a minimum, they must jam. Very loosely speaking (naturally), they value instrumental improvisation over songcraft, live performance over studio recording, real smoke over the machine-made kind. The scene's progenitors (leaving aside a few thousand jazz and blues musicians) are the Grateful Dead and the Allman Brothers, groups who were never known for keeping it brief, and whose descendants—Phish, Widespread Panic, String Cheese Incident—are considered imitators as much for their profligacy as for any real musical resemblances.



Dickey Betts

So when the fourth annual Jammys were held last week, in the Theatre at Madison Square Garden, it was somewhat surprising to see, taped to the wall of every dressing room, a strict agenda of the evening's performances. The intervals were generous but precise; an outfit called Assembly of Dust was scheduled to play from 8:28 to 8:53, at which point they would vacate the stage for the presentation of the New Groove award. This Jammy went to Psychedelic Breakfast, which beat out Raisinhill and the Hot Buttered Rum String Band, among others. The trophy itself is a golden guitar neck in the shape of the letter "J."

Old groove was there, too. The New Orleans piano man Dr. John (9:25-9:50) sat in the corner of his dressing room, leaning on an ornately carved cane, waiting for an attendant to find a lost pack of cigarettes. He squinted at the schedule on the wall. "Let's see, what the hell is all this? I can't see that good no more. 'Derek Trucks.' I can't read that shit, but it don't matter. Whatever." His voice was a low, slurred growl.

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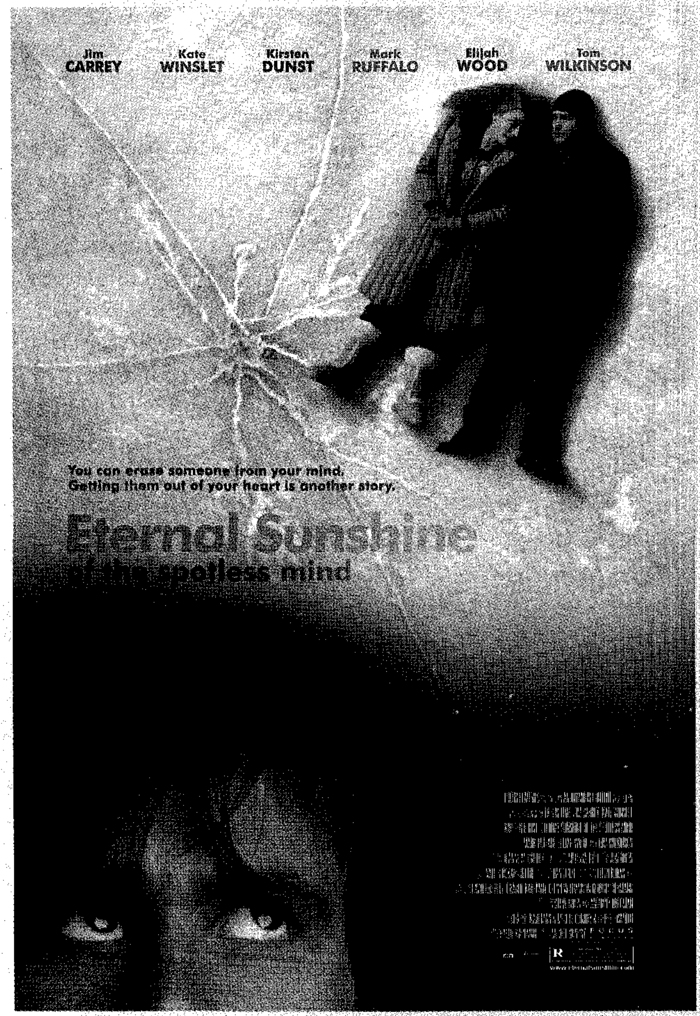
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"I'm the worst guy to ask anything about time. I've got no concept of time and stuff like that."

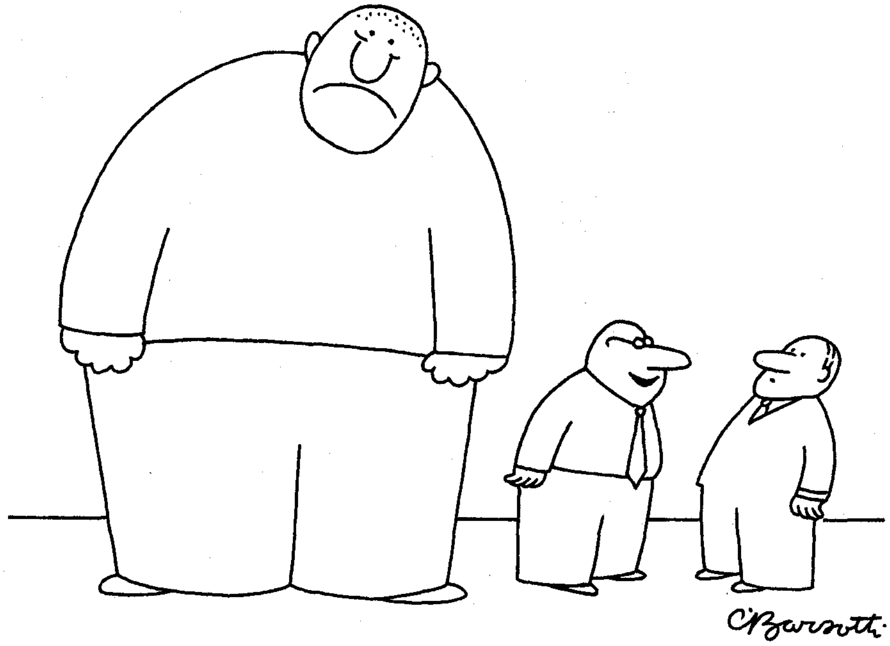
Outside in the hall, the show's impresario, Peter Shapiro, seemed to take a more linear view. Stubbled and pale, with the bedraggled intensity of a fraternity entrepreneur (he used to own Wetlands, the live-music club in Tribeca), he greeted and admonished musicians as they popped in and out of their dressing-room doors, in various states of confusion and inebriation. "We have a five-hour show," he said. "Hopefully, it won't go over. Otherwise, I get screwed." The Garden is a union shop; after 1 A.M. you're into overtime. An extra minute of jamming, he said, would cost him twenty-five thousand dollars.

Onstage, the guitarist Dickey Betts, formerly of the Allman Brothers, was playing "Ramblin' Man" with a band that included the singer Edie Brickell, formerly of the New Bohemians. Sure, it was sweet to hear it all again, but as the guitarists made their leisurely way toward a crescendo and Brickell stood idle through a half-dozen bars, looking either pleased or bored, one couldn't help sneaking a glance at one's wrist. Seven acts to go. Clearly, Shapiro was screwed.

Backstage, jammers wandered to and fro: Robert Randolph, Warren Haynes, Perry Farrell, and even Slick Rick, a rather bewildered participant, who had come down from the Bronx with his wife to perform a special rendition of the hip-hop classic "La-Di-Da-Di" with a band called the Disco Biscuits. "This is very new to me, very new," he said. He was wearing a platinum-and-diamond eye patch. "I'm pretty much on the observing tip right now." He did his thing, and he did it on time.

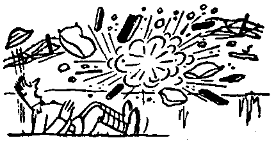
Bass jams, Celtic suites, big pupils, mild gripes about the sound and the setup. A woman offered massages for a dollar a minute. "In a sense, the Jammys never really end," Shapiro was saying. And then, at 12:18 A.M., a mere thirteen minutes late, Steve Winwood, the winner of this year's Lifetime Achievement Jammy, took the stage, as Shapiro looked on with exhilaration. Winwood performed a new one and an old one, then, with twenty-two minutes to go, played the languorous opening chords of "Low Spark of High-Heeled Boys"—a long one. Now Shapiro looked on with fear. The musicians took their turns: guitar, piano, sax. 12:57. But what would a night of jamming be without the big jam number at the end—everyone onstage, jostling for solos and space? On, therefore, to "Gimme Some Lovin'." Shapiro made eye contact with Haynes, one of the guitar players onstage. Haynes smiled. Within a half minute the song was done. The clock read one. Shapiro began hugging people.

—*Nick Paumgarten*



"It's Roscoe, Senator. He's going to take our attack ads door to door."

POSTCARD FROM BAGHDAD
STREET CRIME



The blast from the bomb that blew up the Mount Lebanon Hotel in Baghdad in mid-March knocked me out of my chair and sent my coffee flying out of its cup. A few seconds later, there was a burst from what sounded like a Kalashnikov. Gunfire has become routine in Baghdad, and there are explosions almost every day, but this was the biggest blast I had heard since Saddam's palaces and municipal buildings were being attacked by the United States, exactly a year ago. I am staying in the same hotel, the Palestine, I stayed in then, with its views of the Tigris and, on the other side of the river, the big Presidential complex, which is now occupied by the Coalition Provisional Authority, in what is called the Green Zone. (Everything outside its reinforced walls—in other words, the rest of Iraq—is referred to as the Red Zone.) A great gray plume of smoke was billowing into the night sky, and I went up to the roof to get a better view. Several other hotel guests were already there: Iraqis, Koreans, Italians, Spaniards, a number of Americans, a couple of South Africans. During the past year, hundreds of foreigners—journalists, entrepreneurs, the paramilitary representatives of private security firms—have made their way to Iraq. One entire floor of the Palestine is occupied by employees of Kellogg Brown & Root, the Halliburton subsidiary. When the elevator stops on their floor and the doors open, Nepalese Gurkha guards with snub-nosed submachine guns are standing in the hallway to check out who's getting off.

Baghdad is a much more dangerous place than it was a year ago. A few days before the Mount Lebanon explosion, someone set off a bomb in front of a perfume shop in the same neighborhood—Al-Karrada, a predominantly Shiite section of the city. The target of the attack, who died, was the brother-in-law of Ibrahim al-Jaafari, a member of the Iraqi Governing Council. Jaafari's brother-in-law was not involved in politics, but he was presumably easier to get to than Jaafari, and killing him may have been worth it just to get a message across.

The fall of Saddam has improved the lives of many Iraqis, especially professionals such as doctors, engineers, and teachers, whose salaries have significantly increased. And the streets are clogged with traffic, which wasn't true before the war. A great many Iraqis took advantage of the temporary suspension of import duties at the border with Jordan and bought cheap secondhand cars. The Internet, which was strictly controlled under Saddam, is available everywhere, as are a wide variety of computers, domestic appliances, and cell phones. These life-style improvements notwithstanding, very few people venture out on the streets after dark, and almost no one I know dares drive after ten-thirty. This is because of the staggering increase in the number of rapes, murders, armed robberies, carjackings, and kidnappings. Saddam emptied the country's prisons a few months before the war, and perhaps a hundred thousand criminals returned to the streets. Young girls are now walked to and from school by their fathers or brothers, for fear they might be snatched. Women generally dress much more modestly than they did before, wearing either baggy black abayas or helmet-like hijab head scarves.

It is not only the wealthy who are targeted for robbery and extortion. As in countries like Colombia and Mexico, wives and children of schoolteachers and mechanics are kidnapped along with politicians and rich businessmen. A couple of months ago, the twelve-year-old son of an Iraqi friend of mine, a driver who lives in a working-class neighborhood, was kidnapped one morning while walking to school. My friend had recently bought a nice secondhand car, which he was very proud of and loved to show off. That was probably his big mistake. The kidnappers demanded fifty thousand dollars in ransom. He bargained them down to six thousand dollars, sold his new car, and paid up. Several hours later, the boy was released a few blocks from his home. Since then, my friend has not let his son out of the house, even to go to school.

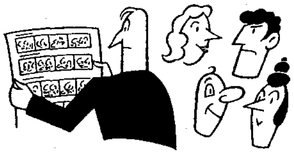
Everyone is on edge here, but foreigners are the main targets of assassination. A few days ago, a German and a Dutch engineer were murdered on the road between Baghdad and Karbala at about the time a journalist friend of mine was driving along the same route. He was travelling with a security detail that was supposed to keep suspicious cars away, but suddenly he realized that a black BMW—the car of choice for assassins in Iraq—had pulled up alongside him. The BMW raced past and then doubled back. As it went by a second time, my friend saw several men inside, staring at him intently. Assassins usually rake the driver's side of a car with bullets on their second or third pass, causing a crash. My friend's driver took evasive measures and escaped down a side road.

Just being around foreigners has become hazardous. In most of the recent killings of Americans and Europeans, Iraqis died with them—their drivers, guards, and interpreters. A couple of weeks ago, assassins in Baghdad ambushed the car of an Iraqi translator who worked for the Voice of America, killing him, his mother, and his young daughter. Many foreigners are starting to move out of the little family hotels that seemed so charming, and others are giving up the comfortable and civilized neighborhood houses they were renting. The Palestine, with its reinforced-concrete perimeter walls, razor wire, armed guards, and bomb-sniffing dogs, is getting crowded.

—*Jon Lee Anderson*

THE WIRED WORLD

THE REAL ORKUT



Last month, the first e-mail asking recipients to join a Web site called www.orkut.com sped its way around the globe. The description of Orkut was a bit of a mouthful: "a community of friends and trusted acquaintances that connects individuals through a social network that grows person by person." Membership was, and is, by invitation only, and in the first days of its existence a horde of aspiring new friends and trusted acquaintances clamored to get in. By last week, more than a hundred and fifty thousand people had joined.

New Orkut members fill out pastel-blue forms: favorite TV shows, career skills, perfect first date, bedroom contents. They upload photographs of themselves in alluring or alarming poses. They find "Communities" to join: Photography (3,449 members), Belgian Beer (114 members), Kosher Roommates ("for copping or recovering roommates of Kosher adherents"; 3 members). If the right Community doesn't exist, they're free to found a new one. They can rate their friends, relying on an ancient system of hieroglyphs—smiley faces, ice cubes, and hearts, which stand, respectively, for trustworthiness, coolness, and sexiness. As for the origin of "Orkut," it derives not from the Finnish slang for orgasm, as many have surmised, but from the name of the Google engineer who developed the site, Orkut Buyukkokten.

"Trustworthy, cool, sexy—it's a good matrix for romance," Orkut said the other day at a high-ceilinged café in Palo Alto, not far from Google headquarters. A slightly built, well-groomed young man with an elfin face, Orkut has an accent that's hard to place—a little German in the vowels, a little Turkish in the consonants—reflecting his Ankara education and his family's stint in Mönchengladbach. He wore pressed jeans, dress shoes, and a red-striped shirt with black-and-gold cufflinks—Silicon Valley semiformal. A visit to his personal Web site betrays a somewhat wilder side. "Call me Orkut," the site reads. "I have been told that I have a colorful personality, and perhaps that is why my friends have given me more nicknames than I can remember. O-Man, Big-O, Orc, Yogi, Ivy's Bitch (if you were not there, never mind), Party Animal, Or-Cute, Orkuttino, Kooter, O, Dostum, and Smooth are some of the ones that I recall at the first hand."

Orkut is a certified masseur and an avid ballroom dancer. "My friends say I'm a great host," he said. "I really like making chocolate fondue. We have wine-and-cheese gatherings, we watch 'The O.C.' and go hot-tubbing."

Although Friendster.com still leads the crowded field of social networking services, and Microsoft will soon launch one called Wallop, Orkut.com is making a strong showing out of the gate. As an Orkut member, Orkut now has more than three hundred Orkut friends, and he turns away many supplicants. "I look at who they are, I look at who their friends are—it could be someone in the Netherlands," he said. "If I'm not sure, I write, 'Have we met before? I'm sorry, I don't remember.' " Rejection on Orkut is silent: the Friends link simply disappears.

When Orkut hears his name now, he doesn't know if what is being referred to is the person, the service, or the activity. Online, Orkut noticed, "orkut" is morphing into a verb, though no one has settled on how it should be rendered in the past tense—orkutted, orkut, or orkat? Orkut declines to endorse any form, although plainly nonstandard usages have sprouted, such as "orking."

Like any good orkutter, Orkut scans his growing network for interesting people, but he hasn't put his position as head Orkut to its most obvious use. "I am not actively looking for a girlfriend," he said. "I am waiting for the magic to arrive." People still seek him out, and he now has a backlog of more than a thousand e-mails. But one in particular recently caught his eye. It was from a man in Turkey who had just named his son Orkut—a rare name, apparently—and who wanted to learn more about its provenance. "He Googled 'Orkut' and came across the Orkut Web page," Orkut explained. "He said, 'I would really like to be a member.' " Orkut hadn't replied yet. "I guess I'll invite him to join," he said. "But I won't add him to my Friends list. I just don't know him."

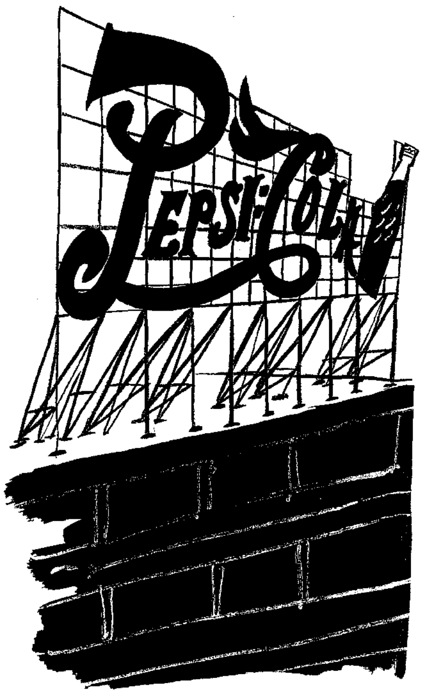
—*Jesse Lichtenstein*

ON THE ROOF

PEPSI DEGENERATION

When Pepsi-Cola erected its big red neon sign in Long Island City, along the Queens side of the East River, in 1936, ships would steam up to the plant below it and unload sacks of sugar from Havana. Soda hasn't been bottled there for five years now, and the plant is being torn down this month to make way for a high-rise apartment complex, so the sign—unofficial landmark and longtime beacon to local residents, film location scouts, and drunken taxicab passengers on the F.D.R. Drive—has to move. Over the past few weeks, it has migrated, letter by letter, from the plant's roof to a site on the ground, three hundred feet to the south.

Each morning, as a group of riggers dismantled the logo, Vera Lutter was watching. Lutter is a forty-four-year-old artist who moved to the city from Munich eleven years ago. "They work very, very fast, much faster than I thought," she said the other day. "Since Monday, they took the bottle, the P, E, P, S, the I—and the hyphen. And today they set their hands on the C in 'cola.' "



Lutter was observing the proceedings from inside a twenty-foot-long wood-frame shack that she built on the factory's roof. She calls it a camera obscura, and it's modelled on the optical devices used by Renaissance artists as a drawing tool; it's basically a giant pinhole camera. Sunlight streams through a two-millimetre opening on one side and projects an upside-down, reversed image of the Pepsi sign onto the opposite wall, where each morning Lutter drapes three big sheets of photosensitive paper. The light burns the image into the paper, which Lutter then takes down and develops and assembles into a single fifteen-by-eight-foot photographic print at her studio, in Manhattan. The prints make up a series that she calls "The Deconstruction of Pepsi-Cola."

She takes only one picture a day, because each print needs up to three hours' exposure. The workmen don't stand still long enough to register as fixed images, but the camera captures ghostly traces of their labors. "With the Pepsi bottle, I was able to get four different shades of gray as they moved it away," she said over the low-frequency hum of a portable generator, which powers a space heater and a red safelight.

Lutter had already rolled up her daily exposure, but when she switched off the safelight what was left of the sign appeared as a projection on the back wall. As the eyes adjusted, other details emerged: the river; the United Nations; the Chrysler Building, its needle pointing at the 'O' in "cola." "Isn't it exciting?" she said. "When I first saw an image projected like this, I just thought I was seeing God."

That occurred in 1993, in a twenty-seventh-floor loft in the garment district, when she turned the place into a camera obscura to record the odd, pleasing shapes on the neighboring rooftops. "I had no intention of doing this more than once," she said. "But I've done very few other things since."

The Pepsi sign wasn't visible from Lutter's loft, and a couple of years passed before she noticed it, riding home one night from a party in Williamsburg in the back of a pickup truck. After lobbying Pepsi for two years to gain access to the roof, Lutter built her camera obscura there in July, 1998. During that summer, she produced her first prints of the sign.

When the new apartment complex is finished, the sign will move again, to a permanent, elevated spot along the waterfront. Though the sign has been good for Lutter's career—the Whitney Museum and the Dia Center for the Arts have exhibited her Pepsi-Cola prints—she has no plans to photograph it again. Reflecting on the more than five years that she has spent on the site, she noted that the Queensboro Bridge is just a few blocks away, and recalled a passage from "The Great Gatsby": "The city seen from the Queensboro Bridge is always the city seen for the first time, in its first wild promise of all the mystery and the beauty in the world."

—*Blake Eskin*

TOM BACHTELL

Even for Drs. Schwartz and Kalet, two people familiar with the fragile biology of humans, the inevitable can be an unpleasant subject. Nevertheless, they know **the life cycle can be hard to predict** and the unthinkable is always a possibility. And they wanted to make sure the ones closest to them would be provided for. That's why they added life insurance from TIAA (part of the TIAA-CREF group) to their portfolio. Then they got back to thinking about the *life* part instead of the *insurance* part.

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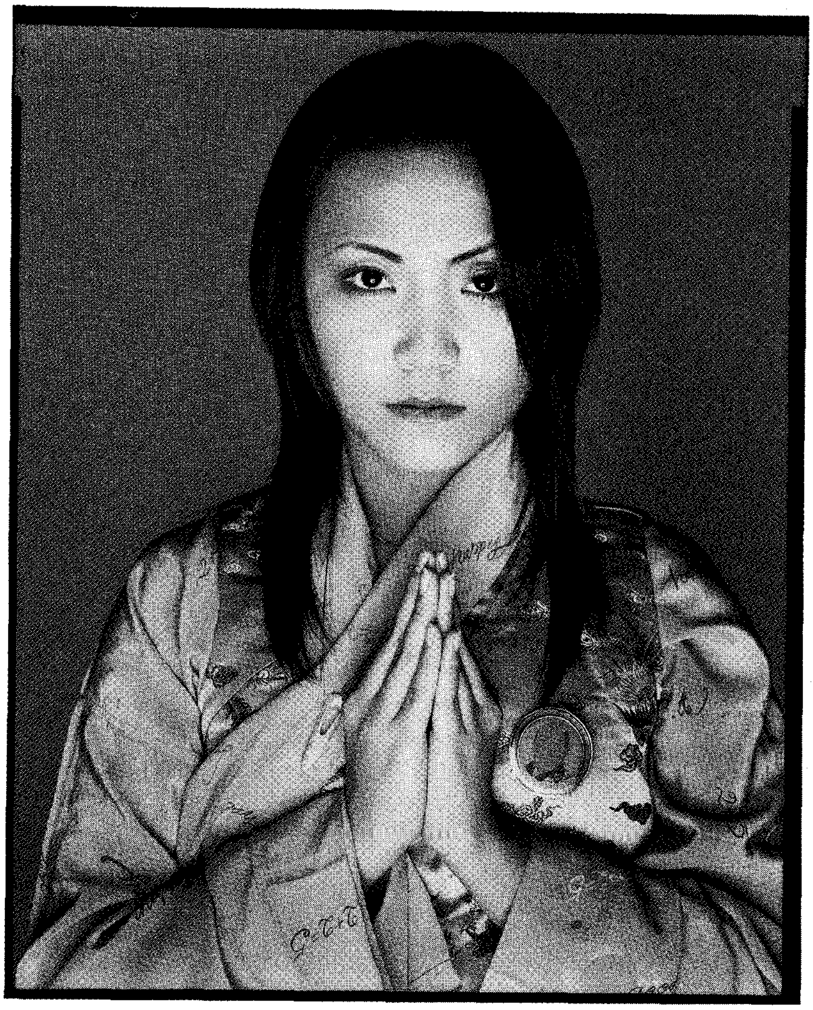
A REPORTER AT LARGE

THE BUDDHA'S DAUGHTER

A young Tibetan-Chinese woman has an unprecedented role to play.

BY ISABEL HILTON



Yabshi Pan Rinzinwangmo in New York City. Photograph by Richard Avedon.

I never met the tenth Panchen Lama, who died at his monastery in Tibet in 1989, but I was introduced to his family in Beijing in the mid-nineties, and recently I went to Washington to see his daughter, Yabshi Pan Rinzinwangmo, a twenty-year-old political-science student at American University who likes to be called Renji. She met me at Dulles airport, slightly flustered, thinking that she was going to be late. She had attended a conference on Tibetan medicine that morning, she explained, and had had to go home to change her clothes. Renji, whose mother is Chinese, uses the title "princess." It's on her calling card. The Chinese government—bizarrely for a country that still thinks of itself as Communist—not only permits the royal honorific but endorses it. Renji's role carries certain obligations, among them the self-imposed discipline of wearing Tibetan national dress on formal occasions. She had spent the morning in a traditional *chuba*, the long robe worn by both men and women in Tibet. Now she was wearing a white knitted top over a black shirt and black trousers.

We walked out to Renji's car, a metallic-beige Mercedes. A fluffy holder on the dashboard contained one of her two mobile phones. There was a blowup toy on the back seat—a replica of a Japanese cartoon bear—and a heart-shaped cushion. Two squishy zip-up cases shaped like hamburgers concealed her CD collection. A photograph of her father dangled from the rear-view mirror, a small version of a formal picture that is given out to pilgrims and other believers. It shows him in a yellow *chuba*, serious, already fat—although not as fat as he became later—his gaze remote. On the reverse side was an image of the Buddha that reminded me of photographs I had seen of the gilded and embalmed body of Renji's father, which is interred in a mausoleum in Tibet. The pictures were encased in plastic and hung alongside a dharma wheel attached to a tasselled gold cord. As Renji drove, she often touched the pictures or smoothed out the cord in a quick, reflexive gesture.

Renji's father was the tenth incarnation in a line of lamas who became powerful in Tibet in the seventeenth century, when the Gelugpa school of Buddhism was established as the country's ruling sect. The Panchen Lama and the Dalai Lama are twin pillars of the Gelugpa hierarchy. The Dalai Lama rules as a king, but the Panchen Lama, who has no formal political role, has, for some believers, greater spiritual authority. They are both *bodhisattvas*—highly evolved beings who have chosen to return to the mortal world to help others find enlightenment. The Dalai Lama is a reincarnation of the Buddha of Compassion. The Panchen Lama is a reincarnation of the Buddha of Boundless Light. They are spiritual brothers.

Renji has never lived in Tibet, but in 1990, a year after her father died, her mother took her to the old Tibetan province of Kham, which has been largely absorbed by the Chinese province of Sichuan. Hundreds of people set up tents by the roadside, waiting for a glimpse of her as she passed. "They told me that there were people lining the road for fifty miles," Renji said, in fluent, American-accented English. "Thousands and thousands of people, all wanting to touch me. I was little, only seven years old. I just thought, Oh shoot, it means I can't go to sleep in the car."

There is, religiously speaking, no reason that Renji should attract devotion. Her father's position as an incarnation of the Buddha is not hereditary. Nevertheless, large numbers of Tibetans treat her as an object of reverence in her own right. "As long as I can remember, people have been interested in me," she said. "People love me and want to be with me because of my father. I have to tell them that I am not a religious leader and that I never will be."

When Renji was seventeen, she went back to central Tibet—which was designated an autonomous region of China in 1965—for the first time since the death of her father. "I wanted to pay my respects to him just before I became an adult," she said. "It's a serious moment." She spent three days in Shigatse—Tibet's second-largest city and the site of the Tashilhunpo monastery, the traditional seat of the Panchen Lamas—and two days in Lhasa, the capital. Again, huge numbers of people turned out to see her. Renji showed me photographs of long lines of people waiting, carrying *khatags*, the white scarves that Tibetans use on formal occasions. "I would get totally dehydrated," she said. "I tried to say something to each one. They had waited for hours, just to greet me, and some of them went back and joined the line again.

"It's tiring," Renji went on. "After a few days, my arms hurt because of putting the *khatags* around people's necks. People seem to think that I am like some kind of Buddha statue. They run into me all the time with their heads. They take my hand and they put it on their heads for a blessing. I tell them I am not a religious teacher, but they want it anyway. I can't complain, because it makes them so happy to see me and to touch me. The only thing that I ask my bodyguards to stop is when they lift up my skirt."

"Lift up your skirt?" I asked.

We were having dinner in a seafood restaurant in Washington that Renji had picked from a list she had printed out from the Internet. It was a Friday night and the restaurant was full of diners.

"Why do they lift up your skirt?"

"Because they want to get to my legs," she replied.

Devotees wish to touch the feet of an important figure and will lift up a robe to do it. "They do it to men, but at least men wear trousers," Renji explained. "I wasn't wearing trousers."

Renji's father was born in 1938 in a Tibetan community in the province of Amdo, most of which has now been incorporated into the northwestern Chinese province of Qinghai. He was then Gonpo Tseten, the son of the headman of the modest village of Wendu. In 1941, representatives of the court of the ninth Panchen Lama, who had died in exile in China after a dispute with the thirteenth Dalai Lama, came through Wendu searching for the Panchen Lama's reincarnation. The search was rather fraught, since the entourage in exile was still at odds with the Dalai Lama's government, which considered it too pro-Chinese. The Dalai Lama's court in Lhasa and the monks at the Panchen Lama's monastery in Shigatse had their own list of boys who might be the new Panchen Lama. Neither side was willing to give way. For three hundred years, the Dalai Lamas had played a central role in recognizing and accepting the Panchen Lamas' reincarnations. Likewise, the Panchen Lamas were crucial to the critical task of identifying the reincarnations of deceased Dalai Lamas. (When the thirteenth Dalai Lama died, in 1933, the ninth Panchen Lama gave three names to the Tibetan monks searching for his reincarnation and told them where the child who was later recognized as the fourteenth—the current—Dalai Lama would be found.)

Gonpo Tseten's birth had not been thought particularly remarkable, although later there were claims that it had been accompanied by miraculous signs, and he was not, initially, a favored candidate. But three boys who were considered more likely to be the reincarnation died in alarmingly quick succession, and on June 3, 1949, the Kuomintang government, in one of its last acts, officially declared Gonpo Tseten the tenth Panchen Lama. He was by then eleven years old. A few months later, the Kuomintang fled to Taiwan, and Gonpo Tseten's entourage declined to go along. Instead, a member of the new Panchen Lama's court sent a telegram to the victorious Mao Zedong in the boy's name, congratulating him on the founding of the People's Republic of China and confirming that the Panchen Lama would give his unqualified support to the Chinese cause in Tibet. In 1951, shortly after the Chinese invaded Tibet, a list of seventeen demands was presented to a delegation in Beijing that represented the Dalai Lama's government. At the top of the list was the Dalai Lama's recognition of Gonpo Tseten as the tenth Panchen Lama. After a hasty divination, the demands were agreed to, and the tenth Panchen Lama arrived in Tibet with a contingent of Chinese troops.

Renji's father settled into the Tashilhunpo monastery in 1952, when he was fourteen. It was the beginning of a terrible time for Tibet. Although Mao had promised that central Tibet would be exempt from the socialist "reforms" planned for the Chinese, in eastern Tibet—the provinces of Kham and Amdo—the Chinese Communist Party set about destroying traditional society. Monasteries were disbanded, monks and nuns were forced to live a secular life, and religious treasures were stolen. Then Mao's Great Leap Forward brought starvation, rebellion, mass imprisonment, and the virtual destruction of the Buddhist church, especially in the Panchen Lama's home province of Qinghai. The Panchen Lama's entourage had been pro-Chinese in the beginning, but how much the Panchen Lama himself supported the Party remains a matter of dispute. It is clear that the Chinese Communists thought he had the makings of an ideal puppet.

After 1959, when the Dalai Lama fled the country, the Panchen Lama was the most senior religious figure left in Tibet, and, as he began to understand the effects of Chinese rule, he moved inexorably toward a devastating confrontation with the leaders he had once admired. In the spring of 1962, he formally submitted a long report that detailed the consequences of Chinese policies for the people in his home province. The Panchen Lama thought that he had made a reasoned contribution to the Party's rule, but Mao Zedong saw him as one of a growing multitude of "reactionary" enemies. That fall, the Panchen Lama was ordered to make a self-criticism. Educated as he was in logic and in the importance of truth, he struggled to identify errors in his conduct. He fell back on

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his spiritual training—the use of dreams and divination—but nothing he tried, or the public humiliations that he was subjected to, led him to the kind of confession that was demanded.

The Panchen Lama's disgrace deepened. In December, 1964, he was brought to Beijing, where, at the height of the Cultural Revolution, he was twice dragged out for vilification at a mass rally. By 1968, he had disappeared into solitary confinement. For years he was thought to be dead. When the Panchen Lama was released, on October 10, 1977, Mao, his old tormentor, was dead and Deng Xiaoping had begun the slow process of reversing the damage done in Mao's last years. But the Tibet the Panchen Lama had known was gone. Only a few of the great monasteries were still standing, and they were all but empty of monks. His enemies in Lhasa who had profited from collaboration in the Cultural Revolution resisted his return. Wherever fate took him after his long imprisonment, it would not be Tibet. His old life over, he decided to build a new one, and he did what no Panchen Lama had ever done. He married.

I had heard several versions of the story of how Renji's parents met, and Renji told me hers. Her maternal great-grandfather, she said, had been a general in the Kuomintang Army who had successfully switched allegiance and stayed on after the civil war to serve the Communists. He had met the Panchen Lama when they were both members of an official delegation, and the Panchen Lama had confessed to him that he was thinking of marrying. He asked Renji's great-grandfather to arrange a suitable introduction.

Li Jie, Renji's mother, was preparing for her first year of study at an Army medical school. "My mother was very popular," Renji said. "Very pretty. She was the best student in her class. Great-Grandfather asked her if she could help find somebody for my father."

Li Jie said that she would have to meet him first, and a rendezvous was fixed at a popular park in Beijing. Li Jie, who was nineteen at the time, took her sister along as a chaperone.

"I think my father just assumed that Mother was the girl that Great-Grandfather had found for him," Renji said. "Father was still very poor. He had no money, his head was shaved, he had no political rights. He told her that he had nothing, but he was very honest and touching. They spent the day together."

Li Jie's family was opposed to the match, Renji said. Marrying a recently released—and not yet fully rehabilitated—political prisoner, and a Tibetan to boot, was not a promising move. Besides, Li Jie had a medical career ahead of her. Li Jie's grandfather refused to speak to her until the wedding day.

"No one in the family supported her except my aunt—the one who had accompanied her on that first meeting—and my great-grandmother, who believed in Buddhism and knew my father was a Living Buddha," Renji said.

If there was trouble in Li Jie's family, there was bitter disapproval on the other side, too. With the monasteries destroyed, many monks had married—either willingly or unwillingly—but it was still no small matter for a figure as eminent as the Panchen Lama to break his monk's vows, especially to marry a Chinese woman from an Army family. The Panchen Lama's mother was never fully reconciled to the match.

The wedding took place in the Great Hall of the People in Beijing on January 28, 1979. It was attended by, among other senior figures, the widow of the late premier of China, Zhou Enlai, who had known and protected the Panchen Lama during the worst times. After the wedding, the couple lived in a house on Dong Zhongbu Street in central Beijing. The Panchen Lama was slowly rehabilitated—the process was completed only in 1988—and, as one of several vice-chairmen of the National People's Congress and the most important Tibetan in the People's Republic, he became a figure of some political importance. In June, 1983, Renji was born. Renji showed me photographs of her family. There was one taken the day after her birth. Her mother is sitting in bed, holding her, her father bending over them both and smiling into the camera.

The Panchen Lama wielded influence through the National People's Congress, and he was allowed to visit Tibet. He set up several businesses to repair and support the Tashilhunpo monastery and to try to boost Tibet's development. He established a training school for reincarnate lamas who had missed out on a religious education, and he recovered the mortal remains of his predecessors, which had been scattered when their tombs were smashed by mobs, and set about building a mausoleum for them. Some of the monastery's former wealth was restored.

As Deng Xiaoping steered China through the reforms of the nineteen-eighties, the family joined the privileged inner circles in Beijing. They were assigned a house in the Western Hills, an area of wooded parkland west of the city, where Renji spent her early years, surrounded by devoted Tibetan servants—there were forty in all—and playing with a small zoo of deer and horses, cats and dogs. There were seaside holidays on the well-guarded beaches of Beidaihe, the resort that is occupied every August by senior Party officials. There were toys and pretty dresses, birthday parties and picnics. Back in town, the Panchen Lama began to build a grand, Tibetan-style house on the edge of the Forbidden City. There were trips, too. In 1986, the family went to Qinghai Province, Renji's father's birthplace, and she had her first experience of being at the center of a crowd.

Religious life gradually revived in Tibet, but in the second half of the eighties there were renewed clashes with the authorities. In 1987, in a speech to the U.S. Congress, the Dalai Lama proposed a peace plan for his country, and this triggered a series of demonstrations in Lhasa. Monks who came into the streets to call for independence were brutally suppressed. The Panchen Lama condemned the protests, using the official designation "disorder." Although he never supported independence, he worked behind the scenes for the release of the monks who had been arrested, and he was a trenchant critic of government policies. On January 23, 1989, while on a visit to Tibet to dedicate the new mausoleum of his predecessors, he told a group of religious and political leaders that the dogmatism that had destroyed Tibet's monasteries and temples thirty years earlier was still threatening the country. There had been development in Tibet under Chinese rule, he said, but the cost had outweighed the benefits. Five days later, he collapsed and died in his palace near the Tashilhunpo monastery. The official cause of death was a heart attack, but rumors soon spread that he had been poisoned.

"I was in kindergarten," Renji recalled. "Mother picked me up and we went straight to the airport and flew to Lhasa. We took a helicopter to Shigatse. I didn't really understand what was going on. Mama went in to see my father first, and later they took me in, although our servant got into a fight with a police-

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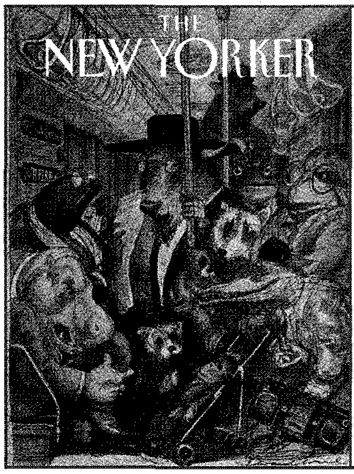

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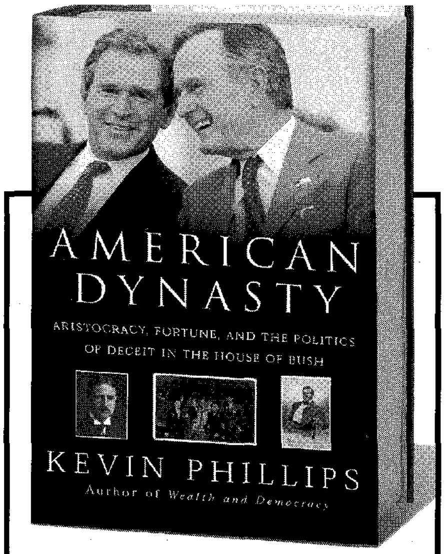
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man about this. My father was covered with a yellow-and-white sheet. He didn't reply to me when I talked to him, which was when I figured out that he had passed away."

Li Jie and Renji went back to Beijing, and riots soon broke out in Lhasa. Martial law was declared—the first time such a step had been taken since the establishment of the People's Republic, in 1949. Hundreds of people were killed and thousands were arrested.

The status of the Panchen Lama's widow and child at this point was ambiguous. For many Tibetans, and especially for the leaders of the Tashilhunpo monastery, they were an anomaly. Li Jie had taken a Tibetan name and dressed in Tibetan clothes. She had learned the language and become a Buddhist. She ate Tibetan food and drank butter tea. She had tried hard to live up to a role that had no precedent in history, but widows simply did not figure in the arrangements of a religious order in which celibacy was a founding rule. Traditionally, a deceased lama's property is kept in trust for his next incarnation. Li Jie, in spite of her Buddhist faith, had a more secular view of her rights. She was determined to insist on a proper provision for herself and her child from the considerable wealth that her husband had enjoyed at the end of his life.

The dispute over the Panchen Lama's property dragged on for years. The Chinese government wanted Li Jie and Renji to move out of the Beijing palace and, at one acrimonious stage of discussions, the power supply to the house was cut off. "Lots of things were messed up," Renji said. "People were coming and going. There were endless meetings. Mama would ask the servants to take me out. She was very protective." Finally, a settlement was reached that left Li Jie comfortably off. The family's former home was rebuilt at government expense, and Li Jie gave up the palace.

The search for the eleventh Panchen Lama became a bitter contest over who had the right to recognize him: the exiled Dalai Lama, whose claim to the role was evident, or the Communist government, which sought to demonstrate the legitimacy of its rule in Tibet by claiming that the critical roles of the Dalai and the Panchen Lamas—whom they referred to as "local leaders"—had always been filled by candidates approved by the emperor of China. Renji's father had been dead for only two days when the Xinhua news agency in Beijing published an article to this effect. Both sides knew that the search for the eleventh Panchen Lama could serve as the dress rehearsal for an even more important event—the search for the fifteenth Dalai Lama. The Chinese needed to establish a precedent for that process. And they needed a Panchen Lama who could be trusted to approve the right candidate when the time came.

On May 14, 1995, the Dalai Lama announced that in a remote district of central Tibet a boy had been found who he was satisfied was the reincarnation of the Panchen Lama. A few days later, there were rumors in Lhasa that the boy and his family had been taken into custody by Chinese security forces and had disappeared. The abbot of Tashilhunpo was jailed for secretly collaborating with the Dalai Lama, and the monastery was occupied until all resistance was broken. On November 29th, a ceremony was held in Lhasa, attended by government officials, at which another boy, whose parents were both reported to be members of the Communist Party, was declared to be the real reincarnation of the Panchen Lama. The Dalai Lama issued a statement describing the Chinese action as "unfortunate." The "Chinese Panchen Lama" was installed in a heavily guarded villa on the outskirts of Beijing. The Dalai Lama's selection has not been seen since.

The following year, Renji's mother decided to send her abroad, "to learn English and meet more people," as Renji explained it. "I had never left home before. When I said goodbye, I didn't know when I would see my mother again." In those days, travelling abroad was an uncertain business for a Chinese citizen. Years might pass before the two were reunited. Li Jie sent her daughter to stay with an aunt who was living in New York and working in the travel business, but the aunt was struggling to support herself, and when Li Jie managed to visit, a few months later, she decided to move Renji to California. She put out feelers, looking for people who might help.

Southwestern Academy, the school that Renji attended for most of her years in the United States, lies just off the main road in San Marino, perhaps a twenty-minute drive from downtown Los Angeles. It has a pleasant eight-acre campus, which is home to some hundred and seventy students, half of whom are American and half from overseas, and most of whom would not prosper in a more competitive environment. The majority of the students I met there were Chinese, and Mandarin was more in evidence among them than English.

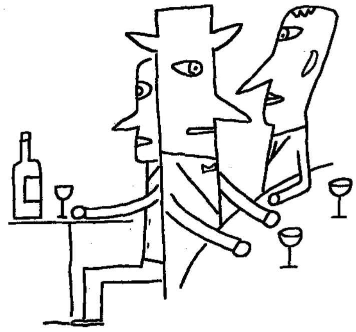
Southwestern's headmaster, Kenneth Veronda, recalled that some members of a local Buddhist community had approached him about Renji in January, 1997. They asked him to interview a young girl who they said was very important to them. Later, a delegation of a dozen people, some of them prominent Tibetans in exile, came to discuss her. Renji, he was told, had changed schools several times. If she came to Southwestern, she must have anything she wanted. Veronda told me he replied that she would be treated like any other pupil at the school.

Renji was not, Veronda said, a studious child, a judgment echoed by a number of her teachers. She loved shopping and pop music, was known as a sharp dresser with a conspicuous taste for Prada, and was close to a boy from Beijing whom the school eventually expelled for smoking. She herself never posed a discipline problem, Veronda said. There were no piercings or tattoos, though she did go startlingly blond for a while, and one of her former teachers said that she went through a worrying phase of attachment to motorcycles. This passed, but Renji does, she confessed to me, love cars. "My father loved cars," she said. "I think I get it from him."

Many of Renji's fellow-students and friends were the sons and daughters of China's newly rich *nomenklatura*—officials who, by virtue of their position, have made vast fortunes in the past two decades of rapid economic growth in China. "Renji and her friends used to tease me about my clothes," one of her former teachers told me. "They would talk about what shoes I should wear, and she suggested Gucci, because it was the cheapest, at around three hundred dollars. I said I couldn't afford that. When I told her I paid fifty dollars for my shoes, she was really shocked." The teacher said that students once had a serious discussion about the relative merits of flying first-class or using your own jet. When another teacher proposed the essay topic "What would I do with a million dollars?" the exercise fell flat, because the students unanimously agreed that a million dollars didn't go very far these days. "It was way out of my league," he said. "One of the girls had an eighteenth-birthday party at the Argyll on Sunset Boulevard, with 'NSync singing 'Happy Birthday.' " After Renji graduated, she invited the teacher to go out for an evening with her friends. "They were incredibly nice to me," he recalled. "We went to a club where she seemed to know the doorman well." The bill came to several hundred dollars per person. The other guests paid without demur, and Renji tactfully covered the teacher's share.

But if the other students could give themselves over to the sybaritic pleasures of spending their parents' money far from home, Renji, the Tibetan princess, was too important a figure, at least symbolically, to be left entirely to her own devices. Too many people took an interest in her future. For the representatives of the Tibetan government in exile, she is a potential bridge between them and the Chinese. For the Chinese, who keep a close watch on her through their embassy in Washington, she is someone with a high street value in Tibet, a value that could be politically helpful, but explosive if mishandled. And for Westerners who sympathize with the Tibetan cause Renji is a trophy to be guarded, precious both for her ancestry and for her potential as a figure who will play an as yet undefined role in Tibetan politics.

Most weekends during her time at Southwestern, a stretch limo would arrive at the campus to take Renji to the home of the action-movie star Steven Seagal. I had met Seagal by chance some years before in Dharamsala, where the Dalai Lama lives in exile. As I waited in an anteroom, the Dalai Lama's secretary, Tenzin Geyche, appeared in the doorway, dwarfed by an enormous man who was clad from head to toe in green silk. His hair was tied in a ponytail and he seemed to be in a mild dream state. "Do you know Steven Seagal?" Tenzin Geyche asked. We shook hands. Seagal smiled benignly, as though from a great distance.



The Tibetan community in Dharamsala is accustomed to exotic visitors. One more Hollywood star made little impression, despite the rumor that his limousine had proved too big for the hillside community's vertiginous narrow roads. Some days later, I read an interview with Seagal in an Indian newspaper. Asked about his Buddhist beliefs, he replied that there was only one God. Shortly after that, Seagal was recognized as the reincarnation of a lama by a Tibetan guru of the Nyingmapa school. For a while, the Internet hummed with outraged comments from distressed Buddhists and supporters of Tibet. As a choice for Renji's protector in the United States, he was, to say the least, controversial.

One evening, Renji and I drove to Seagal's house in the hills above Los Angeles. We pulled off the road into a driveway and stopped by a metal gate. "It's Renji," Renji said into the intercom, and the gate swung open. We drove along an uneven track and pulled up behind a low house.

Seagal was sitting on a long couch in a cluttered living room, fielding telephone calls. A huge oil painting hung on the wall behind him. It depicted a Tibetan guru, surrounded by monks. Young aides came and went, announcing new calls. Behind another couch, a large collection of guitars were piled up at crazy angles. Two German shepherds came over and inspected me closely.

Seagal looked up and asked if I knew a journalist who, I later discovered, had written a series of articles about what he suggested were Seagal's connections with Mafia figures. "I have had no good experiences with journalists," Seagal said. "But I hear that you understand that Himalayan politics are"—he paused, searching for the right word—"deep." He gave me a significant look.

I asked Seagal how he had come to have charge of the Panchen Lama's daughter.

"Well, because of Tibetan politics," he replied. "When Renji was eight or nine, we got word that she wasn't safe. The Tibetan government in exile has its own spies. So she had to get out. It wasn't going to be a kidnapping but an amiable trade-off. Her mother was to remain in China, and she would get out without it seeming absolute. When she was ten or eleven, we got word that this was going to happen. I spoke with my friends there, and they said I was one of the few people who could protect and take care of her . . . be her father figure, her guardian. Try to guide her so that she kept her heritage in the dharma."

He broke off to take a call.

Seagal's account differs from that of other insiders, and, indeed, from that of Renji. She was not in danger in Beijing, and her leaving seems to have been straightforward. Seagal did, however, send his plane to collect her when she moved from New York to Los Angeles. "This is my home here," she said to me. "He was always there for me. My mother and Steven Seagal are the most important people in my life."

Seagal finished his call. He said that he was closely watched when he went to China. He said that he had been studying Buddhism and martial arts since he was a child, and that in Japan, where he lived for a while, he had often been told that he was a reincarnate lama. The Dalai Lama's entourage had changed, he said. Relations seemed to have cooled since I had seen him in Dharamsala.

"The danger for Renji now is getting in with the wrong people," Seagal said. "She has a pure heart. I just tell her, I'm always there for her. Any wisdom I have is at her disposal.

"You're born naked, you die naked," he added. "In between, you should find a spiritual guide. Certain things, you have to do on your own."

I said good night, and we left. "You see what a nice man he is?" Renji said, anxiously.

In Renji's last year at Southwestern, her mother decided to come to California and supervise her daughter's studies to insure that she did well on her S.A.T.s. The two of them moved to an apartment near the school. "It was very tough for my mother, because she couldn't speak English," Renji said. "She cooked, but the kind of cooking she does uses lots of heat and she kept setting off the smoke alarms. It was the first time that I had lived with my mother, just the two of us."

As a high-school student, Renji had hung out, partied, shopped, learned to surf. Back home in Beijing, she is a noted tennis player, but she is also being groomed for public life. Her vacations from school are crammed with meetings. "I have to get three days' notice so I can go shopping with my friends," she said. "I meet all kinds of people—

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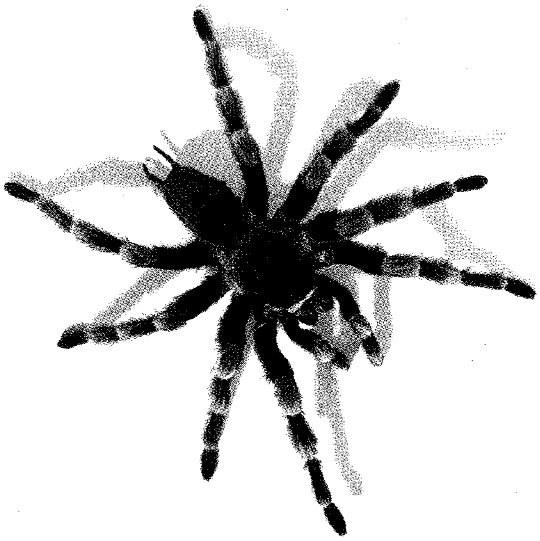

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sometimes officials or businesspeople—and I have to read their portfolios so I know what to talk to them about. Sometimes I have to attend two dinners in a day.

"When I get back to the U.S. after a trip home," she said, "I feel really lonely and lost for a week. I'm on my own. No staff. I have to do my own grocery shopping. And I wake up and think, What am I going to do today?"

In 2002, her mother decided that Renji should make an official visit to Tibet alone. "Actually, I wanted to go to Egypt, but my mother insisted I had to go to Tibet," Renji said. It was the first formal trip that she had undertaken without her mother's supervision, and she was received by high-level officials in Lhasa. The plan was for her to spend several weeks in Shigatse, receiving instruction in religious studies and the Tibetan language from teachers at Tashilhunpo. (Renji speaks Tibetan but does not read it well.) She settled in with her entourage in a hotel in Shigatse, and a schedule was drawn up. She was to pay her respects to her father's body at seven-thirty each morning, then spend the day studying with her teacher in a room on the second floor of the stupa where her father is interred. But within a day of her arrival crowds began to gather at the monastery.

"They stood outside, wherever I was, waiting for me," she said. "At the beginning, it was a little chaotic. They wanted to offer *khatags* and touch me. After two days, the police figured out what to do. They lined them all up and every hour I would come out and go down the line. I would go back and study, and then, at the end of the hour, down the line again." The people brought Renji petitions and letters of encouragement. They gave her money, which she returned. They told her how much they missed her father and urged her to visit more often. Some would try to speak to her but were overcome by emotion and simply wept.

The crowds grew bigger each day. Renji's quiet visit was turning into a major public event. The local authorities began to worry about things getting out of control.

Then the "Chinese Panchen Lama" arrived in Tibet. He was approaching his twelfth birthday, and a special visit to Tashilhunpo had been arranged. The boy now lives in Beijing, in the palace that Renji's father built, under the supervision of his religious tutor. His visits to Tibet have been rare and heavily policed. This time, he arrived when Tibetans, who have shown little sign of spontaneous affection for him, were flocking to see Renji.

"My plan was to stay in Shigatse, to be close to my father," Renji said. But she was asked to travel to Lhasa, three hundred miles away, where a meeting between her and the boy had been set up. "They made me leave Shigatse," she said. "They said there was too much distraction. I was very unhappy about it, and I felt sorry for the people. Whole villages were coming from far away, and I

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know that there were people who were still en route. But they made me leave the next day."

The meeting in Lhasa was very short, Renji said. "There were twenty or thirty people, all officials, his people. I walked in, said hello, how are you. We exchanged *khatags*." She did not, however, prostrate herself before him, though everybody knew that a photograph of the tenth Panchen Lama's daughter prostrating to the Chinese Panchen would be an important affirmation of the government's position on the reincarnation.

I asked Renji how she had avoided prostrating.

It was not an issue, she said. "My father had given me special permission—just to me—not to prostrate to him. If he is my father's reincarnation, I don't have to prostrate to him."

I asked if she had felt anything toward the boy. She shrugged. "I was curious," she acknowledged. "But I didn't really feel anything. We didn't really have a chance to talk." And the other candidate—the Dalai Lama's missing boy?

"I have never met him," she said. "So I don't know."

Renji was bored in Washington. Because of visa complications brought on by tightened security regulations, she had been delayed in getting to school and hadn't been able to register for fall classes. So one weekend we drove to New York with a friend of hers. She pointed out a café in SoHo where she had spent a lot of time. "When I first came to Washington," she explained, "I was so lonely and depressed that I used to come up to New York and I would sit in that café and watch people go by. I was full of rage. But it's O.K. now." We went to a Prada store, and I watched her inspecting racks of clothes with the expertise of a seasoned shopper. I wondered, not for the first time, what it must be like to be both an icon for the Tibetan faithful and a well-heeled, fashion-conscious young woman at home in L.A. and London.

One of Renji's teachers at Southwestern had told me that Renji had seemed intellectually detached for much of her school career. "She didn't seem to feel empowered," he said, "about her life, about anything." He thought it was hard for her to study because her destiny was out of her hands. After her visit to Tibet, when she was seventeen, that changed.

Renji has a standard answer when she's asked about her future. She wants to help the people of Tibet, she says. When she is pressed, her plan sharpens. She wants to be a member of the National People's Congress, as her father was. "It's power," she says. "You need to have power to do things."

Gaining power will involve negotiating several competing interests, although her singular inheritance is strongly in her favor. "The Chinese have a problem," the Tibetan historian Tsering Shakya says. "They have recognized their Panchen Lama and they can't allow Renji to undermine him. On the other hand, her mother has accurately identified a leadership vacuum. The Dalai Lama is outside Tibet, and there is nobody like the old Panchen Lama in the country. There is an opportunity here, and perhaps Renji has it in her to grasp it."

The power that Renji already has is a startling demonstration of the flexibility of a society that many outsiders see as bound by tradition. In that tradition, authority is vested in celibate religious leaders and institutions rather than in family dynasties. Robert Barnett, a lecturer in modern Tibetan studies at Columbia University, remarked to me that Renji's popularity and the influence it gives her has defied all expectations. "She has emerged as a political phenomenon by word of mouth. This has no historical precedent, and I think it shows that Tibetans are capable of creative political solutions to entrenched conflict. They instinctively recognize this as a way of creating a middle ground."

I once asked Renji if she had ever been tempted to choose an ordinary life—a job, marriage, children.

"I can't," she said. "Well, I could, but I can't. It's my duty. It's who I am."

After a pause, she suddenly said, "Who should I marry? Should it be a Chinese? A Tibetan? An American? What would be best?"

"What does your mother say?" I asked her.

"She still thinks I'm a kid," she replied. ♦

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BY BRUCE McCALL

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1. Which statement below is incorrect?
(a) Ann Coulter is not an evil person.
(b) There is no need to raise one's voice when arguing a political position.
(c) We must always remember that Abe Lincoln was a Republican.
(d) It's important to respect opinions that are different from one's own.
(e) Nobody is right all the time.
Answer: Maybe no statement is incorrect.

2. You're at a Peter, Paul & Mary reunion concert when a right-wing militiaman bursts into the hall with an AK-47 and declares that he will hold everyone hostage until the U.S. government admits to war crimes against patriots and agrees to pay one billion dollars in reparations. Do you:
(a) Defuse the situation by asking the audience to join Peter, Paul & Mary in singing "If I Had a Hammer."
(b) Confront the militiaman and ask to see his gun permit.
(c) Take up a collection among the audience to pay a token reparation.
Answer: Perhaps none of the above? Instead, why not call a town meeting and have a free and open debate?

3. It would not be nice for a liberal radio network commentator to mention:
(a) Strom Thurmond's daughter.
(b) Trent Lott's abrupt comedown.
(c) Halliburton's overcharges in Iraq.
(d) George W. Bush's military record.
Don't know__ Not sure__ Let me think__

4. It would be nice for a liberal radio network commentator to mention:
(a) The eradication of polio.
(b) UNICEF Christmas cards.
(c) The bald eagle's comeback.
(d) Increased car safety.
I think so__

5. If Rush Limbaugh were to call me a fuzzy-minded élitist knee-jerk bleeding-heart liberal sissy without cojones enough to support the death penalty, I would:
(a) Softly weep.
(b) Admit that he has a point.
(c) Ask what the A.C.L.U. would do.
Answer: All three could work.

6. If I hosted a liberal radio network talk show, my guests would include:
(a) Pat Buchanan. (c) Bill O'Reilly.
(b) Pat Robertson. (d) Karl Rove.
(*If you checked none of the above, memorize the "Tolerance 'R' Us" poem posted in every liberal radio network rest room.*)

7. From the list below, circle your five favorite words/phrases/names:
(a) Volvo.
(b) Ginseng.
(c) Berkeley.
(d) Canada.
(e) Hiking.
(f) Egg toss.
(g) Henry Wallace.
(h) Dog bandanna.
(i) Tim Robbins.
(j) "Sesame Street."
(k) Dobro.
(l) Vietnam.

8. The four funniest moments in PBS history, in my opinion, were:
1.____________ 2.____________
3.____________ 4.____________
If you cannot think of even one, perhaps we should delete this question from the application. What do you think? ♦

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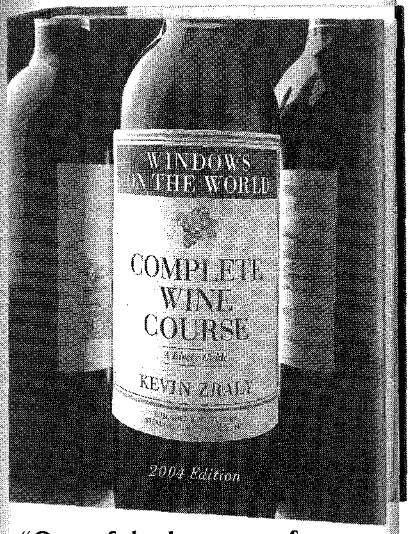

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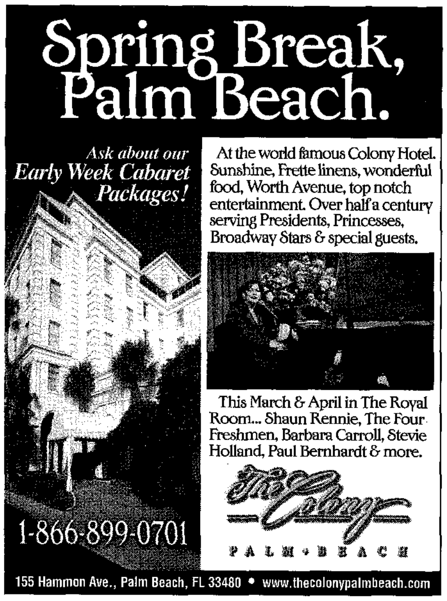
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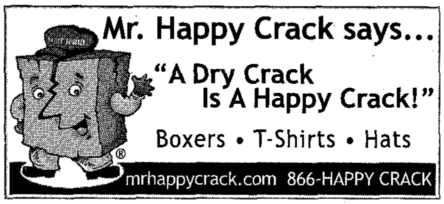
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LIFE AND LETTERS

REPORTING IT ALL

A. J. Liebling at one hundred.

BY DAVID REMNICK

From the start of the American republic, the most tantalizing means of indulging a youthful desire for escape and re-creation has been the sojourn in Paris. It's a long tradition, amply described. The literature begins with the decorous engagements in the letters of Benjamin Franklin and Abigail Adams and leads soon enough to the earthier liaisons in "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes" and "Tropic of Cancer." Much is promised to the prospective traveller: if not a passage of enlightenment or erotic adventure, then at least a taste for boiled innards and string beans done right. As Mrs. Adams wrote home, pleasure is the "business of life" in Paris—there is another way to live, in other words—and this is the lasting gift, and illusion, that every visiting American brings home in his bags.

To this day, countless children of American privilege arrive in the Latin Quarter, bent double under their backpacks and concealing a money belt holding a Eurail pass and a freshly squeezed *carte orange*. One of the pleasures of such an indolent, never-to-be-repeated existence is the liberty it provides the student on leave from academy-drafted reading lists and deadlines that frog-march undergraduates up and down "The Magic Mountain" in the time it took Hans Castorp to catch cold. In the late seventies, while on a sojourn of my own, I bought or borrowed my books at Shakespeare & Company, the destination for English-speaking waywards on the Rue de la Bûcherie near Notre-Dame. One afternoon, while I was browsing in the "used" section, a friend pulled down a paperback by A. J. Liebling for me. I'd heard of Liebling but never read him. He was a hero to some of the "new journalists" of the sixties and seventies, who put him in a nonfiction lineage that begins with Defoe. But Liebling had died fifteen years earlier, in 1963, and almost all of his books were out of print. Sitting on the floor, I started "The Sweet Science," with its introductory flourish:

> It is through Jack O'Brien, the *Arbiter Elegantiarum Philadelphiae*, that I trace my rapport with the historic past through the laying-on of hands. He hit me, for pedagogical example, and he had been hit by the great Bob Fitzsimmons, from whom he won the light-heavyweight title in 1906. Jack had a scar to show for it. Fitzsimmons had been hit by Corbett, Corbett by John L. Sullivan, he by Paddy Ryan, with the bare knuckles, and Ryan by Joe Goss, his predecessor, who as a young man had felt the fist of the great Jem Mace. It is a great thrill to feel that all that separates you from the early Victorians is a series of punches on the nose. I wonder if Professor Toynbee is as intimately attuned to his sources. The Sweet Science is joined onto the past like a man's arm to his shoulder.

I read half the book right there and the rest that night. The Rubens canvases at the Louvre were checked off in my guidebook, but for me Liebling was now the Baroque. His descriptions of the postwar boxing scene at Madison Square Garden, Yankee Stadium, the Polo Grounds, the country training camps, and the midtown gyms constitute a self-enclosed comic universe, and, in the construction and the telling, his pieces are superior even to William Hazlitt's famous account of the "Gasman" Hickman–Bill Neat bout in Hungerford, Berkshire, in 1821, and Liebling's own cherished model, "Boxiana," the multivolume chronicles of the Regency-era fighters, by Pierce Egan. In a style of mock high diction undercut by the homeliness of the subject, of metaphorical flight and eccentric references—a style, in other words, that pays greater homage to the verbal dandyism of Egan (and Mencken and Runyon) than to the hardboiled approach of the tabloids—Liebling made the art of bruising and its practitioners as vivid as any country fair in Dickens. In "The Sweet Science"—in all his books—Liebling himself, the voice and the character, is immensely appealing: he is boundlessly curious, a listener, a boulevardier, a man of appetites and sympathy. He is erudite in an unsystematic, wised-up sort of way. His sentences are snaky and digressive, and thrive on the talk of the Times Square gyms and cigar stores. The boxing pieces are populated by the champions of his time—Ray Robinson, Joe Louis, Archie Moore, Rocky Marciano—but equally present are the artisans and satraps of the ring world, the sparring partners, the cut-and-bucket men and the professorial trainers, like Whitey Bimstein, who presided over Stillman's Gym, "the university of Eighth Avenue," as firmly as Robert Maynard Hutchins ran the University of Chicago. Bimstein was a prototypical Liebling cast member, New York to the bone. Asked about his experience outside the city, Bimstein allowed, "I like the country. It's a great spot."

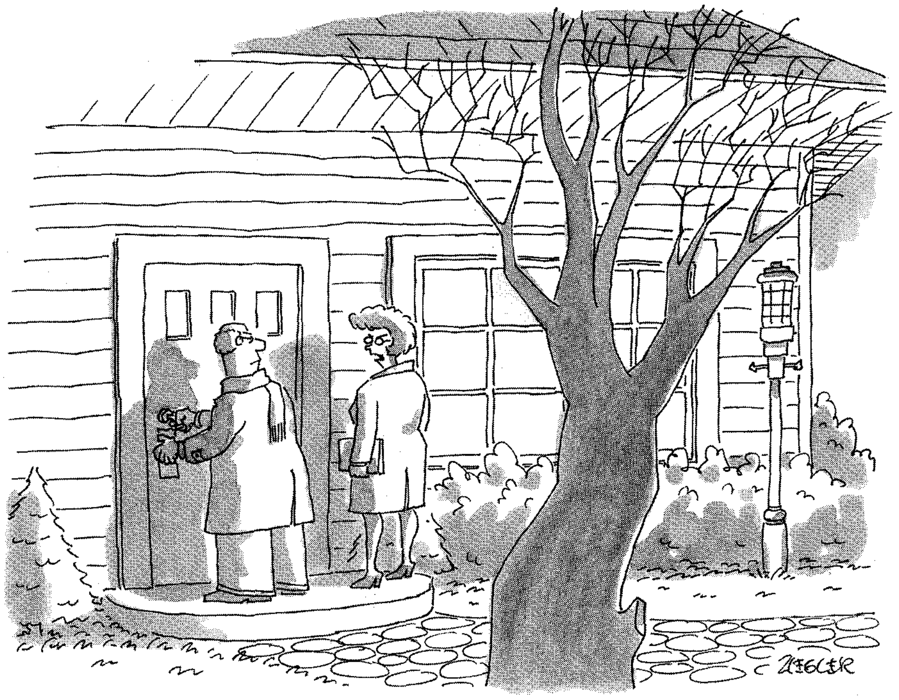
Liebling in 1962. At The New Yorker, he wrote at a blinding rate, publishing hundreds of pieces, of all lengths, colors, and moods.

FRED W. McDARRAH

Besotted with "The Sweet Science," I went back to Shakespeare & Company and took the only other Liebling on the shelf, a copy of "The Road Back to Paris," his first volume of dispatches from France during the Second World War. Combat journalism is prone to some of the same sins as sportswriting—the self-dramatizing narrative voice, the bogus pronouncements. Only the clichés, and the stakes, are different. Liebling, it was obvious, was incapable of cliché, and, if anything, he protested too adamantly his limitations as an observer of the world beyond home. He claimed innocence of high politics and the scale of evil he was about to engage: "Hitler had seemed to me revolting but unimportant, like old Gómez, the dictator of Venezuela." The only way he was prepared to imagine the German enemy was through homey, ahistorical analogy. "I did not think about Germany," he wrote. "When I was a small child I had had a succession of German governesses all indistinguishably known to me as Fraülein. They had been servile to my parents and domineering to me, stupid, whining, loud, and forever trying to frighten me with stories of children who had been burned to a crisp or eaten by an ogre because they had disobeyed other Fraüleins. . . . Anybody who had had a German governess could understand Poland."

Liebling's subjects in his maturity bloomed from the appetites and interests of his youth. As a reporter, he was both observer and memoirist, seeing and looking within. His love of New York became "Back Where I Came From"; an attention to battle and a passion for France led to "The Road to Paris," "Mollie and Other War Pieces," and "Normandy Revisited"; a romance with newspapers led to the criticism of "The Press" and "The Wayward Pressman"; his taste for rogues of all varieties became "The Telephone Booth Indian," "The Honest Rainmaker," and "The Earl of Louisiana." The early passions are always present. His last book, "Between Meals," is as much about the memory of exultant living as it is about the *gigot d'agneau* on his plate.

Abbott Joseph Liebling was not born to the demimonde. His father was a penniless Jewish immigrant from Austria who had become prosperous as a furrier. His mother was from a well-to-do Jewish family in San Francisco. By the time of Liebling's birth, on the Upper East Side of Manhattan, a century ago—on October 18, 1904—there was no taste for religion in the house; any trace of the shtetl or the Lower East Side had been fairly expunged. The aspiration was toward comfort



"Twenty years ago, I invited you in for a nightcap. I now retract that invitation."

• •

and a variety of Americanness. The Lieblings lived first in apartments in Manhattan and then in an oak-shaded house near the beaches of Far Rockaway. They were attended by a string of fräuleins, German maids, cooks, and family attendants, along with a "houseman" named Louis, "a Tyrolese from Meran." There were trips to Europe beginning when our hero was three, and, always, dinners at good restaurants in town.

Liebling, who started out "Abbott" and eventually insisted on "Joe," was the sort of brainy child who did not seem to mind that he was neither handsome nor athletic. He was plump and pigeon-toed, and had tiny, delicate hands, but he also had a certain confidence. (In middle age, he crowned his avoirdupois with thick-lensed, wire-rimmed spectacles and a bowler—gestures of the self-assured.) He did well in school in a happily random sort of way. With equal enthusiasm he memorized the names of Napoleon's marshals, the cast of "The Pickwick Papers," and the characters in the Sunday funnies. His guide to the greater world and to his own future was contained in the armload of papers his father brought home from work every day: "It is impossible for me to estimate how many of my early impressions of the world, correct and the opposite, came to me through newspapers. Homicide, adultery, no-hit pitching, and Balkanism were concepts that, left to my own devices, I would have encountered much later in life."

Following a semi-successful run at Dartmouth (from which he was booted for missing chapel once too often), Liebling attended Columbia's journalism school. Indifferent to the curriculum and its modest expectations, he studied French and translated the erotica of Restif de la Bretonne on the side. Otherwise, he wrote later in "The Wayward Pressman," the program had "all the intellectual status of a training school for future employees of the A & P." Like many novice reporters, he had literary ambitions, which at first he took to be the province of fiction. Over the years, he began and abandoned many short stories and longer pieces, including a novel called "The Girl with the Cauliflower Ear: A Romance," about a female boxer named Eula who, after plunging into an aquarium tank in a moment of suicidal doubt, falls in love with an ichthyologist.

After finishing at Columbia, Liebling had a brief apprenticeship on the *Evening World*, which opened up a gaudy landscape of police shacks, curbside tragedies, and late-night card games. Liebling took to it. A press pass for a child of the Rockaway bourgeoisie was a ticket to experience, without experience's costs. "I liked to pound up tenement stairs and burst in on families disarranged by sudden misfortune," he wrote about his first assignments as a reporter. "It gave me a chance to make contact with people I would never otherwise have met, and I learned almost immediately what every reporter knows, that most people are eager to talk about their troubles and are rather flattered by the arrival of the *World* or the *Journal*." He went on to a beginner's job in the *Times* sports department, where he was charged with writing up basketball box scores, a chore that bored him to such a degree that he occasionally wrote Ignoto—"Unknown," in Italian—in the space reserved for the name of the referee. Some nights, according to Liebling, Ignoto officiated games throughout the city. Liebling claimed that when this crime was discovered his boss fired him for being irresponsible. He told the story repeatedly, and with relish, and it may even have been true. What is surely the case, his biographer Raymond Sokolov makes plain, is that Liebling was an indifferent stenographer. He had no future at the *Times*.

In 1926, Liebling's father came to the rescue by asking him if he might like to suspend his career (he was now starting work at the *Journal* in Providence) and take a year to "study" in Paris. Never has a son been in such ready agreement with his protector:

> I sensed my father's generous intention, and, fearing that he might change his mind, I told him that I didn't feel I should go, since I was indeed thinking of getting married. "The girl is ten years older than I am," I said, "and Mother might think she is kind of fast, because she is being kept by a cotton broker from Memphis, Tennessee, who only comes North once in a while. But you are a man of the world, and you understand that a woman can't always help herself. Basically . . ." Within the week, I had a letter of credit on the Irving Trust for two thousand dollars, and a reservation on the old Caronia for late in the summer, when the off-season rates would be in effect.

Thus began what surely must be recorded as the most salubrious year abroad since Flaubert left for Egypt. France was, for yet another American, a sentimental education. "I liked the sensation of immersion in a foreign element, as if floating in a summer sea, only my face out of water, and a pleasant buzzing in my ears," Liebling later wrote. "I was often alone, but seldom lonely." His monthly drawing account was sufficient to bankroll the young man's desire to study (lightly) at the Sorbonne and to dine (with relish) at the best of Paris's lower-priced restaurants. Liebling began to eat, and eat, as if his life, and his eventual livelihood, depended on it. It was soon his contention that, just as a fighter must put in his roadwork to extend his stamina for the later rounds, so, too, must a true eater (and fledgling food writer) consume enormously if he is to have a range of dietary experience worth sharing. What would he have to say, after all, on a diet of soda water and scrambled eggs? Proust's madeleine was a mere "tea biscuit" and a barrier to greater literary achievement: "In the light of what Proust wrote with so mild a stimulus, it is the world's loss that he did not have a heartier appetite. On a dozen Gardiners Island oysters, a bowl of clam chowder, a peck of steamers, some bay scallops, three sautéed soft-shelled crabs, a few ears of fresh-picked corn, a thin swordfish steak of generous area, a pair of lobsters, and a Long Island duck, he might have written a masterpiece."

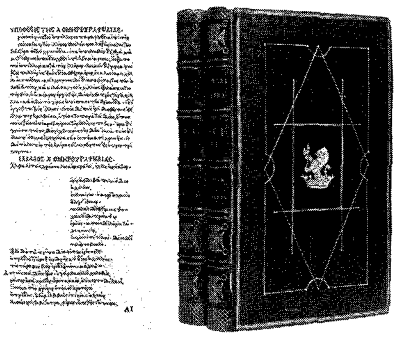
It was under the instruction of Yves Mirande, a Parisian legend of both the stage and the plate, that Liebling learned to eat with ambition. In a typical meal, he followed the order of Darwinian evolution, beginning with the bivalves and halting only at the primates. As he writes in "Between Meals," Mirande was for him a tutor of the heart and the body:

> In the restaurant on the Rue Saint-Augustin, M. Mirande would dazzle his juniors, French and American, by dispatching a lunch of raw Bayonne ham and fresh figs, a hot sausage in crust, spindles of filleted pike in a rich rose sauce Nantua, a leg of lamb larded with anchovies, artichokes on a pedestal of foie gras, and four or five kinds of cheese, with a good bottle of Bordeaux and one of champagne, after which he would call for the Armagnac and remind Madame to have ready for dinner the larks and ortolans she had promised him, with a few langoustes and a turbot—and, of course, a fine *civet* made from the *marcassin*, or young wild boar, that the lover of the leading lady in his current production had sent up from his estate in the Sologne. "And while I think of it," I once heard him say, "we haven't had any woodcock for days, or truffles baked in the ashes, and the cellar is becoming a disgrace—no more '34s and hardly any '37s. Last week, I had to offer my publisher a bottle that was far too good for him, simply because there was nothing between the insulting and the superlative."

When Liebling came home to New York, he proceeded to campaign for a job on Joseph Pulitzer's *World*, which carried the work of James M. Cain and Walter Lippmann and was known at the time as "the writer's paper." In order to attract the attention of the city editor, James W. Barrett, Liebling hired an out-of-work Norwegian seaman to walk for three days outside the Pulitzer Building, on Park Row, wearing sandwich boards that read, "Hire Joe Liebling." Barrett took no notice of the sandwich boards, but another editor hired Liebling as a freelance feature writer after reading one of his pieces. Now Liebling could begin hanging out at the saloons and night clubs, the racetracks and corner stores, where he met the harmless "parliament of monsters" who eventually appeared in "Back Where I Came From" and "The Honest Rainmaker." The *World* was an all-access ticket for Liebling, then in his late twenties. He felt tickled to call it a job.

"The pattern of a newspaperman's life is like the plot of 'Black Beauty,'" he wrote. "Sometimes he finds a kind master who gives him a dry stall and an occasional bran mash in the form of a Christmas bonus, sometimes he falls into the hands of a mean owner who drives him in spite of spavins and expects him to live on potato peelings. The Sunday *World* was a dry-stall interlude in my wanderings."

Things turned chilly and damp after 1931, when the perfidious Roy Howard bought the *World* and merged it with his *Evening Telegram* to form the *World-Telegram;* but, in the meantime, Liebling, working alongside his new colleague and friend Joseph Mitchell, was set free to interview the likes of Casey Stengel and Louis-Ferdinand Céline, cover pinochle tournaments, and make heroes of the self-appointed "mayors" of various city neighborhoods. One of the commonplaces of feature



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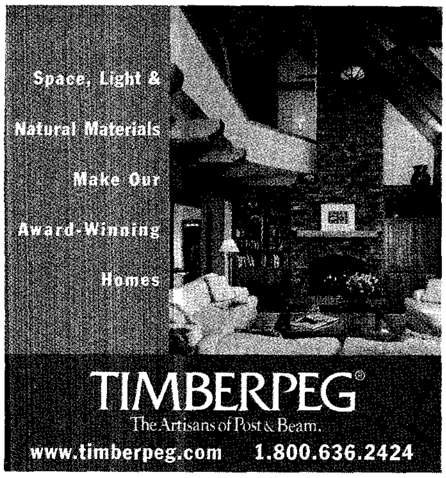
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writing at the time was a tendency to embroider. That is, there was a lot of making things up or, at the very least, helping things along. What is now a hanging offense was then a risible misdemeanor. Details were embellished, colors heightened, dialogue faked. Liebling was a superior reporter and writer, but he also availed himself of the era's advantages. At this point, there is no telling precisely what his characters said and what Liebling supplied. Without making excuses for him, one can say that he did seem to make genre distinctions: his work on more serious matters—the war, the press—was factual. The rules have changed radically, and Liebling's gifts and reporting energies were such that he would surely have had little trouble adjusting to them, in a poolroom or on a battlefield.

Liebling joined Harold Ross's *New Yorker* in 1935, when he was thirty. He was informed that five stories were "reserved" for him, including "Africa, Big Game, Hunting In" and "Billiardists, Finger-Technique, Exploits." Nothing much came of that. But, after an awkward year in which he stuck too closely to the conventions of newspaper feature writing, Liebling had his first triumph at the magazine, doing all the reporting for a three-part Profile of a preacher and mountebank named Father Divine. The piece, which was written mainly by St. Clair McKelway and was published under the title "Who Is This King of Glory?," helped Liebling get accustomed to the time and the space that no newspaper could afford him. He also perfected a singular interviewing style; according to Brendan Gill, he would "sit facing the person from whom he intended to elicit information; and then sit there and sit there, silently. . . . Liebling's method left the interviewee unnerved and at a loss as to what he was expected to defend himself against; by the time Liebling had put the first question to him, he was ready to babble almost any indiscretion."

Along with Mitchell, who fled the *World-Telegram* and joined the *New Yorker* staff in 1938, Liebling soon transformed the magazine. In voice and carriage, the two men complemented each other. They walked the city together and ate lunch together at the Red Devil and Villa Nova and drank at Bleeck's and Costello's, and, on weekends, they went to the Rockaway beaches together to wade in the ocean and listen to the crowds. Mitchell was a courtly North Carolinian; unlike Liebling, he came at the city from the outside in, though his sympathy for its characters was no less absolute. The temperaments of the two men, especially on the page, diverged. In person, Liebling could be unnervingly quiet, but in print he was an ebullient Falstaff to Mitchell's Feste, the melancholic clown in "Twelfth Night." Liebling was ribaldly comic, prolific, a writer of big effects, while Mitchell could be as spare in his line as he was in his output. (Mitchell died in 1996, outliving Liebling by thirty-three years, but he stopped publishing after his masterpiece, "Joe Gould's Secret," ran in the magazine, in 1964—just eight months after Liebling's valedictory essay, "Paysage de Crépuscule.")

What Liebling and Mitchell shared most intensely was a love for the city and an unpretentious yet serious interest in the higher reaches of journalism. For his part, Liebling admired, and meant to emulate, the British writers of the eighteenth century who observed every corner of society, the Fancy who ruled things and the Poor who feigned to listen; he favored above all the ones who wrote least stingily both in volume and in metaphorical profusion—Defoe, Egan, and Hazlitt. Liebling also called on influences as varied as George Borrow, the British literary adventurer and Bible salesman, and Ibn Khaldun, the fourteenth-century Tunisian historian, and commonly quoted them for historical authority and ironic flavoring. Liebling's office contained just what his readers might have expected: stacks of newspapers, unfinished manuscripts, a three-volume edition of "Boxiana," Harold Nicolson's "The Congress of Vienna," the collected Camus, the latest Annual Report of the New-York Historical Society, Stendhal's "Journal," and von Bernhardi's "Cavalry in War and Peace."

Joy, pure and immediate, is a rare literary experience. Liebling provides it. And, from everything we know, joy is what he felt in the creating. No matter what else he may have been facing in his life—misery in marriage, persistent debt, the obesity and sickness that were the price of his appetites—he revelled in his work. Liebling so enjoyed himself at the offices of *The New Yorker*, where he worked for twenty-eight years, that he could be heard humming and snorting with laughter as he pulled the sheets from his typewriter and read them over. He knocked himself out, if he did say so himself. Reticence was not his way. Like Trollope polishing off several thousand words before leaving for his day job as surveyor general of Waltham Cross, Liebling wrote at a blinding rate, publishing hundreds of pieces, of all lengths, colors, and moods. He was occasionally seen in the magazine's bathroom stripped to the waist, washing up after a night's exertion at his Remington.

Despite Liebling's prodigious output at the magazine, and the collection of those pieces into books, he never ceased to see himself as a melancholy "wage slave," forever in debt. His letters, hundreds of them, are filled with the details of his shortfalls, tax problems, and dunning notices. His first wife, Ann McGinn, whom he married in 1934, had grown up in an orphanage and, as it soon became evident, was schizophrenic; she required long and expensive hospital stays. Even after their separation, Liebling continued to pay most of her bills. She suffered from hallucinations and "fugue states"; she would sometimes get up from a restaurant table, walk out the door, and disappear for days. Liebling's second wife, Lucille Spectorsky, was a spendthrift whom one friend, the *New Yorker* editor Gardner Botsford, recalls as "a big blonde from rural Kentucky, amiable if dumb." Liebling's only moments of conjugal peace came with the writer Jean Stafford, who had been married, unhappily, to Robert Lowell. Their union was hardly a picnic on the lawn—there was a great deal of drinking and decline, and Stafford stopped writing—but the four years they spent together were the least miserable either one had known.

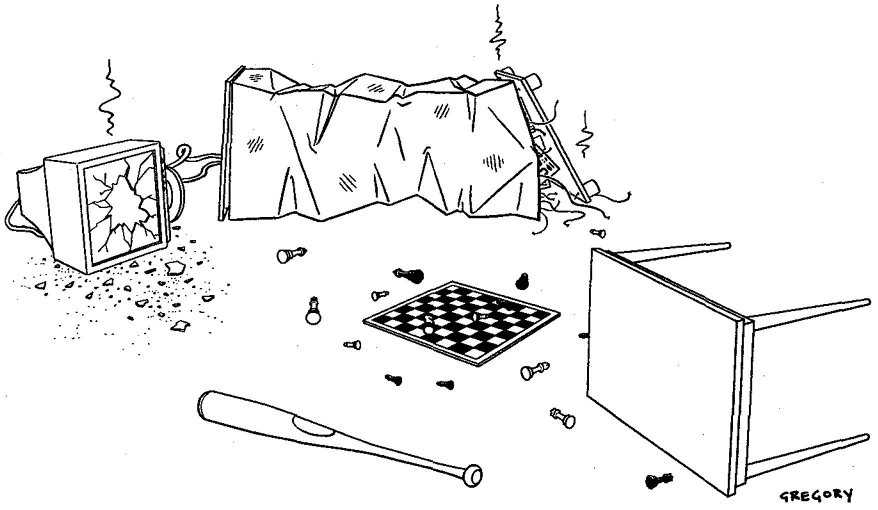
And yet, professionally, Liebling was almost never blocked or unlucky. In 1939, when Harold Ross began to prepare for the coming war, he sent Liebling to Paris, a move that seems perfectly right now but occurred mostly because the magazine's correspondent in France, Janet Flanner, had to rush home to her ailing mother, and because, as Liebling recalled, "I had spent several man-hours of barroom time impressing St. Clair McKelway, then managing editor, with my profound knowledge of France." As Liebling readily admitted, he was not exactly Ernie Pyle but, rather, a New York reporter of a particular kind. "There is an old proverb that a girl may sleep with one man without being a trollop, but let a man cover one little war and he is a war correspondent," he wrote in "The Road Back to Paris." "I belong to the one-war category. I have made no appearances for Mr. Colton Leigh, the lecture agent, either in a gas mask or out of one, and I have no fascinating reminiscences about Addis Ababa or the Cliveden set. Prior to October 1938 my only friends were prize fighters' seconds, Romance philologists, curators of tropical fish, kept women, promoters of spit-and-toilet-paper night clubs, bail bondsmen, press agents for wrestlers, horse clockers, newspaper reporters, and female psychiatrists." Ross was wary of this experience, and his advice to Liebling was "For God's sake keep away from low-life." Liebling was convinced that Ross was trying to "disinfect" the magazine and publish only pieces about "Supreme Court justices and the Persian Room of the Plaza." Nevertheless, he promised to keep his coverage "reasonably clean and high-class" and booked a ticket on a Pan American Clipper to Lisbon.

Reading Liebling's pieces from Paris (and, later, from London and the North African front), you don't get a coherent idea of the course of the war. There is little talk of high politics or the over-all battlefield. But such coherence, the editors must have calculated, was the business of the *Times* in the short run and the historians in the long. What Liebling in his frequent dispatches provided was a richly textured sense of the day-to-day reality of occupation, invasion, and battle—a foxhole successor of "Homage to Catalonia," a forerunner of "Dispatches." In Paris, Liebling installed himself at the Hotel Louvois, looked up some old friends, and eventually followed the retreat of the government to Tours and then to Bordeaux.

Gardner Botsford, then an officer in the First Infantry Division, met him in Caumont, France, one afternoon. "One's first view of Liebling dressed for combat was a memorable one," Botsford writes in his memoir, "A Life of Privilege, Mostly." He continues:

> The only Army pants big enough to button around the magisterial paunch left him with a vast, drooping seat behind, a flapping void big enough to hold a beach umbrella. The legs of the pants were tucked into knee-high gaiters left over from the Spanish-American War, leading to a pair of thin-soled lounge-lizard civilian shoes. Other correspondents generally tried to look more military and more warlike

GREAT MOMENTS IN CHESS



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than any soldier—parachutists' boots, aviators' scarves, tankers' jackets—but Liebling was not one to pretend. He was a correspondent, not a soldier, and he looked it.

EPIPHANY

While you're gazing in the mirror all the names change.
It will all be all right, you've said, when push comes to shove
And the snow's sheer mortal diamond will have left us
Its legacy of watergallop and what-have-you: it will be
A question of reflection, not this heartlessness of lightbreak,
The horrid jag edge of shadow.
                                        Take, for instance, this morning:
Beneath the ice-clamp of Casperkill Creek you saw clear water
Run into its own life against the odds, making (the way things
Will) a fresh start. Just as a raucous, high-minded, truth-telling
Matter-of-fact congregation of crows comes tumbling.

—*Eamon Grennan*

As a correspondent, Liebling took history personally. The collapse of France, in June, 1940, was a tragedy not only for the French. "France represented for me the historical continuity of intelligence and reasonable living," he wrote. "When this continuity is broken, nothing anywhere can have meaning until it is reëstablished. After the Munich settlement I began to be anxious." At war, Liebling no longer employs the high-diction, low-reference voice of his city pieces. Though he was a writer of voluble digression and irony, he also knew something about control and modulation. His sentences are tighter, more direct, less jokey. In "Quest for Mollie," Liebling tells of travelling during one offensive on La Piste Forestière, a dirt road on the northern coast of Tunisia, where Allied forces had fought Italian and German troops, and coming across the refuse of fighting—"bits of the war . . . like beads on a string." He encountered a lone corpse, "a private known as Mollie." A month later, after the Allied victory in North Africa, Liebling heard more about "Mollie," evidently a colorful native of Hell's Kitchen, and so, back in New York, he moves around the city, from bar to union headquarters, reconstructing the often contradictory details of Mollie's life, and giving an ordinary young man a representative immortality. "When I walk through the West Side borderland between Times Square and the slums, where Mollie once lived, I often think of him and his big talk and his golf-suit grin. It cheers me to think there may be more like him all around me—a notion I would have dismissed as sheer romanticism before World War II. Cynicism is often the shamefaced product of inexperience."

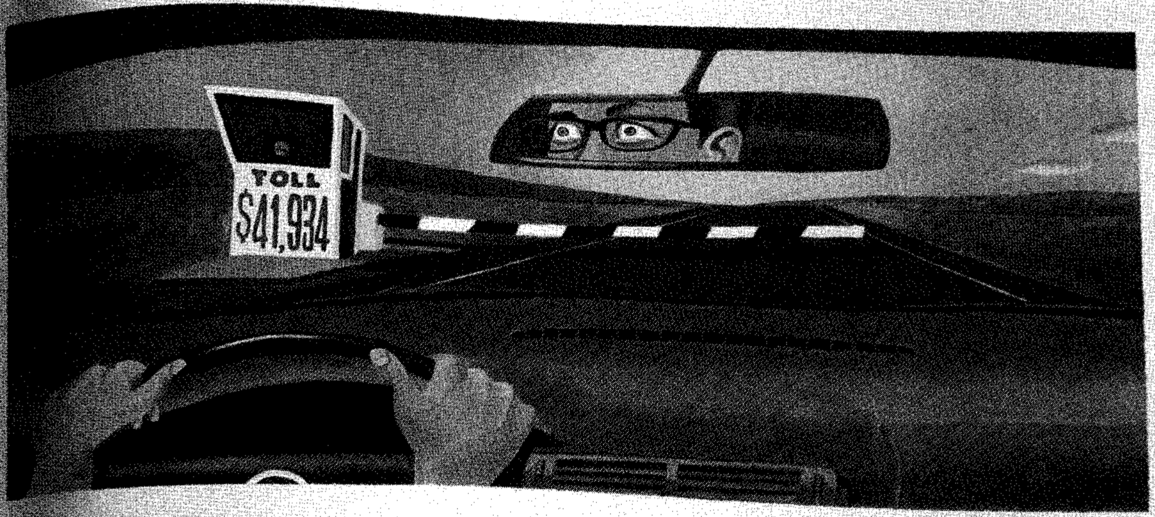
At all times, Liebling is self-mocking, close to the ground, reminding the reader that the correspondent has only a particular view of the war, that the best he can relay is what he actually sees in a given moment: the fear and the boredom and the discomfort. ("If there is any way you can get colder than you do when you sleep in a bedding roll on the ground in a tent in southern Tunisia two hours before dawn, I don't know about it.") Even in Normandy during the D Day invasion, there is no self-admiration or grandeur. His tone is clear and so is his gaze, even when he is swept up by what, for him, was surely the greatest triumph of the war, the liberation of Paris:

> For the first time in my life and probably the last, I have lived for a week in a great city where everybody is happy. Moreover, since this city is Paris, everybody makes this euphoria manifest. To drive along the boulevards in a jeep is like walking into some as yet unmade René Clair film, with hundreds of bicyclists coming toward you in a stream that divides before the jeep just when you feel sure that a collision is imminent. Among the bicyclists there are pretty girls, their hair dressed high on their heads in what seems to be the current mode here. These girls show legs of a length and slimness and firmness and brownness never associated with French womanhood. Food restrictions and the amount of bicycling that is necessary in getting around in a big city without any other means of transportation have endowed these girls with the best figures in the world, which they will doubtless be glad to trade in for three square meals, plentiful supplies of chocolate, and a seat in the family Citroën as soon as the situation becomes more normal. There are handsome young matrons with children mounted behind them on their bikes, and there are husky young workmen, stubby little *employés de bureau* in striped pants, and old professors in wing collars and chin whiskers, all of them smiling and all of them lifting their right hands from the handlebars as they go past. The most frequently repeated phrase of the week is "*Enfin on respire.*" (At last, one breathes!)

Liebling's sense of civilization was finally righted, and, as ever, he sensed civilization through its pleasures, the anticipation of dessert, the bicyclists speeding through the streets, the careless exposure of a young woman's legs. Paris was free.

By the end of the war, Liebling's stature had begun to match his girth. He was a big voice in New York journalism, something new, and he needed a new subject at *The New Yorker*, beyond the recreations of the sweet science. He found it in the shenanigans and vanities of American newspapers. (Television had not begun in earnest, and radio seemed not to interest him.) Reviving the Wayward Press department, Liebling returned to the comic voice of his New York reporting pieces and retooled it for criticism. His politics leaned left, and he hardly concealed his disdain for most newspaper owners and for the conventions of right-wing journalism. In "Horsefeathers Swathed in Mink," he wrote, "There is no concept more generally cherished by publishers than that of the Undeserving Poor," and eviscerated even the *Times* for taking up the nonexistent case of a woman in a mink coat "with $60,000" in assets who was said to be receiving welfare checks from the city. He bashed the columnist Joseph Alsop, who "orbits the earth like a moon, descending for a day or two now and then to lecture an Arabian King or a Bessarabian prelate on his duties"; he did the same to Colonel Robert R. McCormick, the editor and publisher of the Chicago *Tribune*, who made preposterous around-the-world reporting trips in his private plane, putting Liebling in mind of "Tom Sawyer and his balloon." He was a critic but not a scold. After Stalin died, in March, 1953, and the papers issued endless contradictory reports, all with boundless certainty, about the cause of his death, Liebling seemed a man in bliss as he sorted through the clippings spread across his desk. "Inconsiderate to the last, Josef Stalin, a man

It's surprising what most investors don't know about the road to retirement.



When most investors start out on the road to retirement, the only thing they can see is where they want to end up. Yet, what they should really be watching is how much they're being charged to make the trip. Because when it comes to fees and expenses, the little things can really add up.

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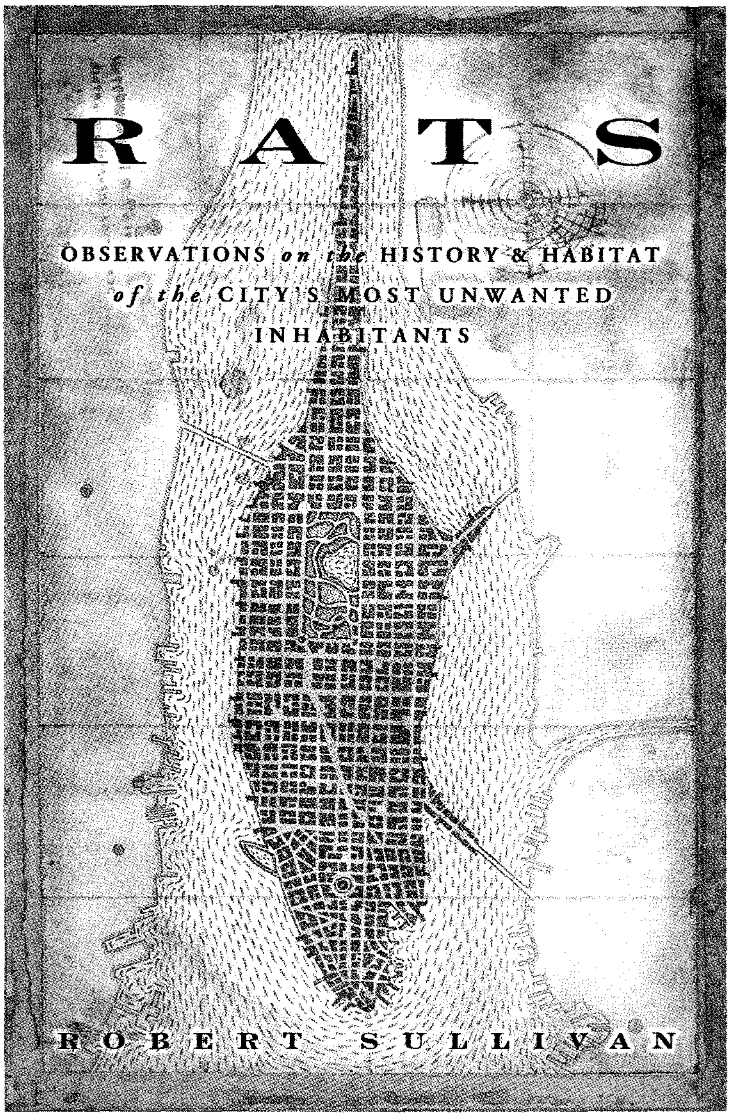
RATS
OBSERVATIONS on the HISTORY & HABITAT of the CITY'S MOST UNWANTED INHABITANTS
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"*Rats* is the rare book that both delights and makes your skin crawl. Its vision of urban issues is insightful, entertaining and—yes—a little bit creepy."
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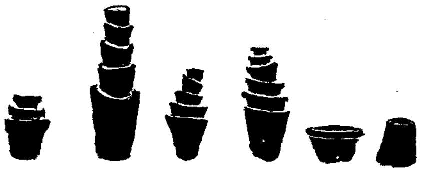
who never had to meet a deadline, had the bad taste to die in installments," he observed on March 28th. In a later column, he wrote:

> Within a week after Stalin's announced demise, the American public knew that he had died of natural causes or had been murdered subtly, either on the date named by Pravda or several weeks earlier; that the people of Moscow had demonstrated grief but (a *Journal-American* scoop) the demonstration had been a carefully organized fake; that his death portended either a hardening or a softening of policy toward the West, which, in turn, would lessen or increase the chances of open war; and that his death would either precipitate an immediate struggle for power among the surviving leaders or impel them to stand together until they got things running smoothly. It was freely predicted that in the event there was a struggle Malenkov would destroy his associates or his associates would destroy him. The subject permitted a rare blend of invective and speculation—both Hearst papers, as I recall, ran cartoons of Stalin being rebuffed at the gates of Heaven, where Hearst had no correspondents—and I have seldom enjoyed a week of newspaper reading more.

The names of those who came under Liebling's assault are now mainly forgotten, but their bigotry and jingoism and fakery all have resonant equivalents today. It is usually a tiresome exercise to imagine what some departed luminary would make of present-day follies: "What would Mencken have thought about George W. Bush?," and so on. With Liebling, however, the temptation is hard to resist, given the range and big-heartedness of his disapprovals. We miss the ferocity of his attack. What, indeed, would Liebling have made of Geraldo Rivera at war or Ann Coulter's best-selling charges of treason? What would he have written of the Tyson-Holyfield ear-biting fight or a Times Square in which Colonel Stingo and the porn palaces have been replaced by Madame Tussaud's and Toys R Us? Of the decline of French cooking or the rise of Rupert Murdoch? We imagine him laughing as he yanks a page from his typewriter.

Liebling finished his life and career with two masterpieces, "The Earl of Louisiana," a book-length profile of Huey Long's half-mad brother Earl, and "Between Meals," a memoir of Paris and of pleasure itself. At war and at home, Liebling had always feigned a certain indifference to politics—or, rather, he approached the subject with the derision it usually deserves—and yet in his campaign travels through Louisiana with Earl Long he is hilarious and capable of glossing the racial dynamics and Mediterranean spirit of Louisiana, simply because he is a supreme observer. He writes:



> Uncle Earl wore a jacket, shirt, and tie, a pattern of statesmanlike conventionality on a night when everybody off the platform was coatless and tieless. The tie itself was a quiet pattern of inkblots against an olive-and-pearl background, perhaps a souvenir Rorschach test from Galveston. The suit, a black job that dated from the days when he was fat and sassy, hung loosely about him as once it had upon a peg in the supermarket where the Governor liked to buy his clothes.
>
> He left the dude role to Morrison. And, in fact, before the night was over, he said:
>
> "I see Dellasoups has been elected one of the ten best-dressed men in America. He has fifty-dollar neckties and four-hundred-dollar suits. A four-hundred-dollar suit on old Uncle Earl would look like socks on a rooster."

As a voice in print, Liebling was almost invariably buoyant and alive. As a man, he tended toward diffidence, even periods of melancholy. The trait grew more pronounced as he aged. Money problems and health problems were wearing him down. What had been a torrent of words was, by 1963, a trickle. It took him months to work through a short piece on Camus's notebooks. Heart and kidney ailments, along with repeated bouts of the flu and the pain of chronic gout, made writing difficult. Soon he was no longer writing at all. "For the first time in his life, he developed a real block," Jean Stafford told Sokolov. "Depression was new to him." His head filled with Camus, Liebling made a reporting trip to Algeria, but nothing came of it. He visited Paris and Normandy, knowing that it was likely for the last time. A kind of despair was overtaking him. One afternoon, Liebling and his friend and *New Yorker* colleague Philip Hamburger were returning to the office from lunch. "One of those New York grotesques appeared, half crippled, half spastic," Hamburger said later. "Joe took one look and began to cry. I could see something was wrong. He was on the edge." Liebling died on December 28th. He was fifty-nine. His last words were in French. ♦

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LETTER FROM SOUTH TEXAS

THE CHURN

Creative destruction in a border town.

BY KATHERINE BOO

Last August, in a corner of South Texas where local newspapers still call businesses "corporate citizens," an emergency vehicle paid a visit to a highly fortified underwear mill. The hundred-and-fifty-three-year-old Fruit of the Loom company, owned by Warren Buffett's Omaha-based Berkshire Hathaway, had just announced that its Cameron County factory would close by the end of the year. Much of its production would be shifted to Honduras. The news brought the county government's mass-layoff response squad to the scene.

The first task of the Rapid Response Unit (actually, one spiky-haired twenty-six-year-old named Mario Maldonado) was to buffer the shock of the eight hundred workers who, only weeks before, had been sure that their jobs were safe. The second task was tougher: to convince those workers, in the face of double-digit unemployment and thirty-three-per-cent poverty rates, that this economic equivalent of an axe blow was in fact a main chance.

Rapid-Response Mario, a local himself, had grown deft at drawing out this line of reasoning. The factories that had closed here in the past four years evoked an informal history of middle-class sartorial choice: Levi's and Wrangler jeans; Carter baby clothes; Converse sneakers; Dickies uniforms; Vanity Fair lingerie; North Face parkas; self-belted Haggar slacks. Mario exudes solidity, from his broad chest to his black, unflinching eyes, and though he suspected that many of the workers would never again have jobs as good as the ones they were losing, sentimentality was not part of his commission. He was here to help workers figure out what happens next.

Fruit of the Loom had chosen a few veteran laborers to go, briefly, to Honduras to train the cheaper workers who would replace them. Some of the others would board the meat- and poultry-industry buses that idled outside the county employment office, luring those sufficiently desperate to take short-term

slaughterhouse jobs in the Ozarks. But, as Fruit of the Loom's cutting machines and bleaching vats were cranked up on pallet jacks, loaded onto flatbeds, and hauled to the Port of Brownsville, many of the company's workers pocketed a month's severance and filed into Mario's van. They applied for unemployment assistance equal to roughly half their former wages, took aptitude tests, and studied the twenty training brochures that were taped to the van's walls. And thus they joined the Rio Grande Valley's eight thousand other former inseam, watch-pocket, and waistband experts in what economists call capitalism's necessary churn.

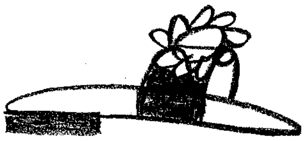
Mario knew a little about revising life expectations, having taken this job when he could no longer afford tuition at the University of Texas. He and his wife had just had their first child, a daughter. If he occasionally felt his resourcefulness flag as he helped middle-aged men with six children type up résumés that said, "Willing to take entry level," he consoled himself with the thought that Fruit of the Loom, a factory nearly the size of Madison Square Garden and one of the county's largest private employers, might be globalization's final local casualty. "Honestly," he said, "there's not much left to close."

Cameron County, which has a population of three hundred and thirty-five thousand, sits at the southernmost tip of Texas and consists of a smattering of small towns and two cities, Harlingen and Brownsville. The shuttered factories bear polite signs on their doors: "At this time we are not accepting applications." Its laid-off workers still speak of their former employers with affection—their loyalty reiterated on the back pockets of their jeans, the neckbands of their T-shirts, and in the form of pet Chihuahuas named Chuck Taylor and 501. But Cameron County's textile workers are now, as units of labor, generic. After forty-one straight months of job loss in the American manufacturing sector, they are a class of obsolescents in need of repurposing.

Lupita Sanchez is a veteran member of the obsolescent class. Her mother stole across the Rio Grande when she was nine months pregnant, in order to bear a daughter with American citizenship and improved odds of a tolerable life. In due course, Lupita, who is now thirty-three, fulfilled this maternal ambition. Raised on both sides of the border, she grew up to be a decently compensated seamstress, and then a quality-control supervisor, at a Brownsville mill that made Mickey Mouse and Little Mermaid T-shirts for Disney. The stability of this work had given Lupita's daughter Silvia, now thirteen, a sense that she belonged to the American middle class. On the sum-

After she lost her job, Lupita Sanchez tried to reinvent herself for a different marketplace. Photographs by Gilles Peress.

mer day that the Fruit of the Loom announcement marked the end of the county's textile era, Silvia sat erectly at the dining-room table of her parents' small frame house, a ponytail loose at her neck, trying to master Bach's "Bourrée Anglaise" on her secondhand flute (thirty-three dollars a month on an installment plan). Silvia seemed unaware that the demise of an industry might in some way affect her well-being—an outlook that her mother wanted to preserve.



Lupita has a round, open face and a purposeful way of walking even when she has nowhere to go. Before her factory closed, in 2001, she and her husband, a pipe fitter's helper named Sergio, had together earned thirty-five thousand dollars a year, plus benefits. That amount, combined with shrewd home economics, was enough to raise their children—Silvia and her younger siblings, Sandra and Luis Ángel—and treat them to a weekly blowout at Peter Piper Pizza. In August, 2003, the family's income, without benefits, had fallen to thirteen thousand dollars, well below the poverty line of $21,959 for a family of five.

After she lost her job, Lupita had tried to reinvent herself in accordance with market imperatives. First, she earned a G.E.D. and a certificate at the local branch of the University of Texas, as a "Microsoft Office Specialist." When she discovered that this certificate provided her little entrée into actual offices, she took out a thirty-five-hundred-dollar loan and trained to be a certified medical assistant—taking vital signs, scheduling appointments, and drawing blood (a task at which, given her dexterity with a needle, she excelled). Although few people Lupita knew had health insurance anymore, health-care occupations still accounted for nearly half the job vacancies in the county, a statistic manifest in the classified ads that she read every morning before turning to her current occupation—rolling out tortillas and grilling two hundred fajita lunches to peddle at local construction sites.

She took home thirty dollars a day from this private enterprise, which was just about what she had earned the last time she worked outdoors. Two years after her father's sudden death (when she was seventeen), she left home to do migrant farm labor in Michigan and Indiana. The work had been predictably dismal, but she had embraced the consolations at hand: the clean rivers, and Sergio, who had followed her North from the border. When she was nineteen, she married Sergio; two years later, they had Silvia, and two years after that, a second daughter, Sandra. Lupita was tormented by the thought that her daughters might grow accustomed to life in migrant barracks. Between picking seasons, she returned to Brownsville, put on her best blouse, walked into a local textile mill, and asked if she might learn to sew.

Since the nineteen-sixties, low-slung steel-and-concrete factories had been springing up all over the county's farmlands and chaparral flats, their owners lured by mild weather and cheap labor. To workers, the mills possessed a clear-cut hierarchy. Fruit of the Loom (whose entryway for a time bore a cautionary banner, "Wear the Union Label—Unemployed") was a better place to work than Vanity Fair or Haggar, but it was not as good as Levi's, the sole union shop, which paid the highest wages. Most of these employment options had come at the expense of millworkers in places like Lowell, Massachusetts, or Henderson, North Carolina; but until recently few South Texans had given much thought to this correlation. In the race for a cut-rate, docile labor force—the Great Unregulated Place—Cameron County had, only a decade ago, been in contention. But, as economic boundaries extended far beyond the North American continent, this community no longer rated.

Cameron County is full of geckos, free-tailed bats, twice-fried-food franchises, and audacious contradictions. A replica of the Statue of Liberty is attended not by the "Give me your tired, your poor" inscription but by a notice that the spot is under twenty-four-hour surveillance. Anglo sons of the Alamo wear cowboy hats with guayaberas made in China. The United States' richest diversity of birds shares the sky with the smoke trails of eight hundred thousand smoldering tires from a dump just over the Mexican border. And, while the rhythms of daily life often seem to have two speeds, slow and stop, the county has negotiated American economic history's two greatest transitions—from farming to manufacturing and, now, from manufacturing to service—in the space of forty years.

Lupita's neighborhood, an unincorporated scrap of Brownsville called Cameron Park, has been an axis of both transitions. According to the 2000 census, it is the poorest place in America. Its six thousand residents have a per-capita income of forty-one hundred dollars, and its roads have only recently been paved. There are no street lights, and the scents and sounds of roadside corncob venders and feral cats evoke the homeliest of Mexican villages. Still, the lives unfolding here testify not just to economic hardship but to a strain of what used to be called American exceptionalism—the elasticity of economic class. Once a landing point for indigent, illegal farmworkers, Cameron Park is now populated mainly by working (and voting) second-generation citizens whose emotional investment in their homes and their community is intensified by their itinerant pasts. Secondhand double-wides have been enhanced with pastel paint jobs, oval windows, and bevelled-glass doors. Yards are gaudy with plumbago, the circular driveways enclosed by wrought-iron fences. The local Catholic church is the neighborhood social center, and the middle-school chess team is nationally ranked. But, these days, the forces of social mobility press downward.

Lupita, like many other Cameron County natives, knows the script that outsiders have in mind now when they visit: the ways in which plant closings wrench the heart from a community. But in twenty-first-century America, where even the bleakest corners have absorbed the cultural authority of Sarah Jessica Parker and Bed Bath & Beyond, the mourning is not for a vanished way of life; and the crippled hands endemic among veterans of twenty thousand inseams stanch a good bit of nostalgia. What's mourned is material and specific: the Tommy Hilfiger watches and the college educations that your teenagers asked for, health insurance, the decent car, the white kitchenette set you coveted for the house whose loss you're now struggling to forestall—the stuff, immense and absurd, of family stability.

Since the turn of this century, three million American manufacturing jobs have disappeared. Some economists and politicians attribute this loss to global trade deals. Others credit improvements in production efficiency. But, however the responsibility is apportioned, most people agree on one point: the need to retrain displaced workers. Under a popular, expanding federal program called Trade Adjustment Assistance, workers who are judged to have lost their jobs because of foreign-trade policy are eligible for the sort of expensive, generously conceived assistance that has become a rarity since Great Society strategies fell out of fashion. Beneficiaries like Lupita receive up to two years of aggressive training in "demand occupations"—jobs identified by government and business officials as growth areas—as well as unemployment compensation and subsidized health care while they learn. It has been estimated that this assistance can cost up to twenty thousand dollars per worker.

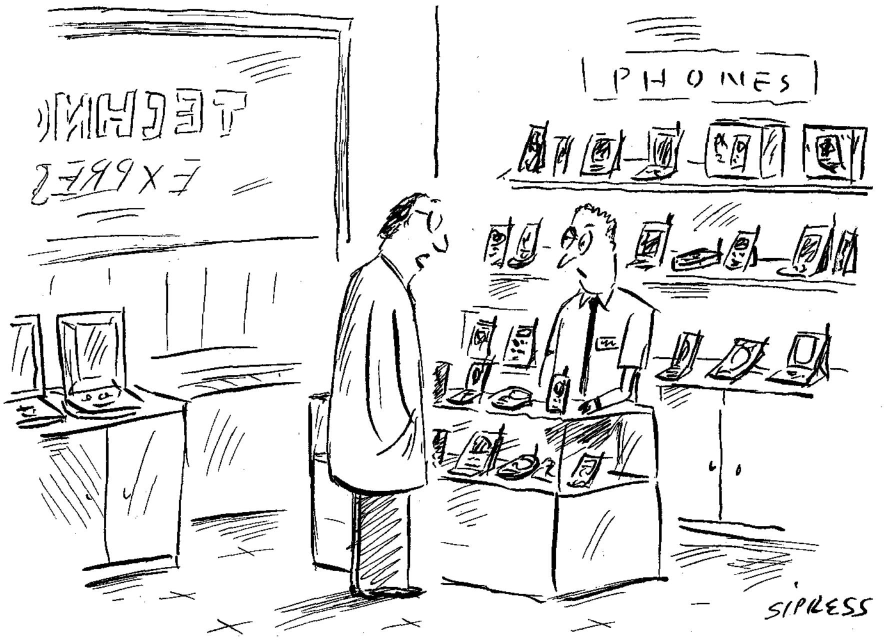
The state of Texas, which was disproportionately affected by the 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement, has in the succeeding decade become a national model of this market-driven worker reëducation. Since 2000, it has received forty-eight million dollars in federal retraining money, not including a $1.6-million "national emergency grant" awarded after Fruit of the Loom announced its closing. With that financial support, closed banks, mills, and military facilities have been reincarnated as centers for the development of what administrators call "the twenty-first-century workforce."

Across the street from Lupita's closed factory, former textile workers study computer maintenance in a shopping mall whose stores have moved away. In one aisle, a red-white-and-blue poster, near a pile of mannequins from an erstwhile J. C. Penney store, reads, "Creating Higher Skill, Higher-Wage Job Opportunities in Your Community: George W. Bush." At a long-shut United States Air Force base, women who were about to graduate from a business-computing course looked one day like a congeries of Whistler's mothers: clad in black plastic hairdresser's capes with white tab collars, they waited tight-lipped for their waist-long hair to be snipped into blunt cuts and bangs. An instructor in high heels told them, "It's like in that show 'Queer Eye for the Straight Guy'—a little polish can make a huge difference, especially in the office environment."

There was a local saying about rich Anglos that always made Lupita laugh: "They see lightning in the sky and think that God is snapping their picture." Although she had graduated from her medical-assistant training with honors—a feat for someone who hadn't been in a classroom since the seventh grade—she had no time to be smug. In the three weeks since finishing, she had applied for twenty-nine openings and had three interviews, which struck her as a reasonable rate of return, though none had led to a job. According to the numbers, mass reëducation in Cameron County was progressing well. In the past five years, more than a thousand displaced manufacturing workers had been retrained as medical assistants or air-conditioning repairmen or computer-maintenance technicians. Ninety per cent of them mastered their new skills and graduated, a ringing success rate by historic standards, and particularly striking given that many of the students are eighth-grade dropouts who once spoke no English. Reëntering the job market, they were assisted by advanced search technologies, the diligent and personable Rapid-Response Mario, and a state public-assistance program that makes not working virtually impossible. "What happens next," the teachers told them, "is up to you."

Lupita, having had no success with her medical-assistant job applications, tried to focus on the benefits derived from spending more time with her kids. She was beginning to comprehend the Italian musical directions—"vivace," "allegretto"—that rolled off her elder daughter's tongue. She liked to eavesdrop when Silvia and Sandra, who is eleven, discussed what they would be when they grew up. Lupita had no memory of her own early ambitions. "I suppose there was so much actual doing of work, from a very young age, that I had to exile from my mind what I *wanted* to do," she said. Shy, long-limbed Silvia hoped to be a doctor: she was strong in science. Sandra wanted to be a doctor, too, as well as a supermodel and a convenience-store clerk. Both girls were smart, but Sandra was the wild one—barrelling through the front door, which was crowned by a crucifix of palm fronds, to hold impromptu dance performances in the gravelly front yard. She waited impatiently for the day (not soon in coming) when her mother would allow her to dye her hair pink.

Lupita had once danced, too, but motherhood had made her more fearful. Before conceiving her youngest child, Luis Ángel, who is now three, Lupita sought permission at the neighborhood



"Do you have one of those phones you can talk to people on?"

church, San Felipe de Jesús, whose perceptive clergy compensated for aging linoleum and a lack of pews. "I wanted Father Mike's opinion—the real, blunt truth I asked from him—of whether we were doing well enough as a family to have a third," she said. She resisted taking out the loan for medical-assistant training until she'd planned the family budget two years into the future.

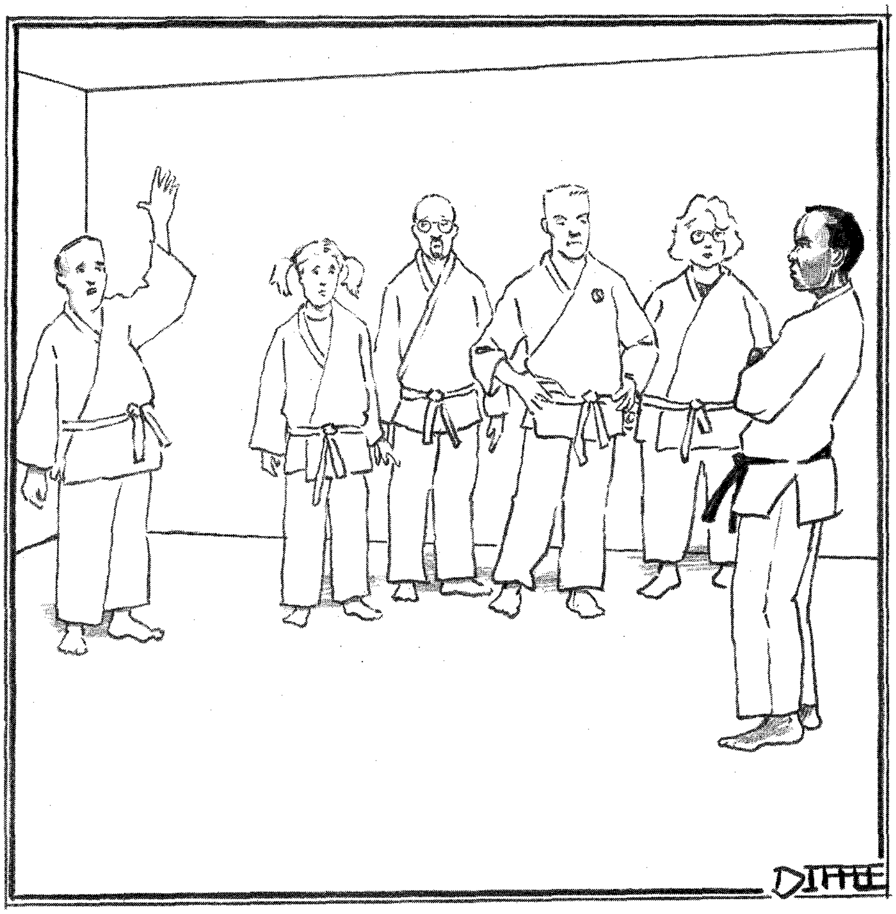
From her own improvisatory childhood, Lupita knew the tricks of low-budget householding: when even Wal-Mart is out of your price range, secondhand clothes can be purchased by the pound, the pallet, or the bale; the Port of Brownsville contains enough fresh crabs for three days' dinner, if you have a bit of raw chicken and some string to fish them out. But, as the fall of 2003 progressed, her unemployment and health benefits had expired, her 401(k) from the textile factory had been cashed out, and she was still selling lunches. The state workforce commission had predicted that twenty-five medical-assistant jobs would open in Cameron County in 2003, but it would be difficult to secure one. In one class of laid-off textile workers alone, eighty-five people had been trained for the profession.

Other Cameron Park job-seekers sustained their hopes by lighting "miracle candles" sold in local grocery stores—candles emblazoned with messages like "Select Me for the Company" or "Increase the Wages Offered." Lupita's strategy was to engage in severe self-correction. She lay awake many nights reappraising job-interview performances: errors in grammar, scandalous open-toed shoes. "Since I have no experience, I need to dazzle," she told her younger brother Lázaro, her confidant, who lived around the corner. "But what is it that makes this person or that one dazzle so?" She thought it might be a matter of self-expression. The problem wasn't her facility with English. She spoke the language well, and certainly better than Sergio did. He was still learning, moving his lips as he watched Spider-Man cartoons with Luis Ángel. Her difficulty came from a habit of reticence that had once been a strength. For a pretty young woman in migrant camps, silence was the best defense against the nosy and the predatory; it allowed her a sliver of privacy. But the stillness of a thirty-three-year-old woman being interviewed at a downtown Brownsville chiropractor could easily be mistaken for stupidity. Lupita longed to have at her command, in any language, "those big round words that explain better what goes on in your mind, and which help people know who you are. I mean, those proper words that come from the deeps of a person, and that burn a little when they're spoken."

Like others in Cameron Park, she had heard some unsettling after-training stories. Karla Chávez, from Levi's, who had retrained in small-business management, allegedly began to direct an immigrant-smuggling concern—an enterprise that ended summarily last spring, when nineteen of her clients suffocated in a locked tractor-trailer. The tales that really shook Lupita, though, were the "successes": hyperefficient Mary Frances, for instance, who, after being turned down by every hospital in the county, started at "A," under "Physicians" in the phone book, and reached the "W"s before she got her first job offer as a receptionist—for forty-five per cent of what she'd earned at Levi's. She took it gratefully. And Mary Frances had been in personnel management.

In their days of relative wealth, Sergio had built the family's home himself, and didn't now fixate, as Lupita did, on how the lemony paint they'd chosen to brighten its low ceilings and bare Sheetrock had faded into the general murk. He frankly preferred the busy, confident Lupita—the one who laughed when he contended that a Friday night of sin made one saintly for the rest of the week—to the one who agonized over finding a job. "Lately, I think Sergio likes being a father more than being a husband," she said, "though I suppose I wouldn't have it the other way around."

Over the years, the fringe of hair around Sergio's handsome face had developed a delicate upward curl, the accidental styling of perpetual sweat. Before finding pipe-fitting work, he had been a roofer, a laborer at a large nursery, a tile layer, and a bird tender at a Brownsville breeding farm, charged with shampooing uncoöperative ostriches with Downy soap. Now he worked for the American subsidiary of a Singapore conglomerate



"But what if we're attacked in the press?"

that had an outpost on the Brownsville waterfront. As a pipe fitter's helper, he earned seven dollars and twenty-five cents an hour. The word "helper" did not mean that he would progress to the better-paying real thing, even though he had taught himself to read blueprints, which was a requisite of promotion. The state had predicted only a few pipe-fitter openings for the coming year. Still, Sergio felt that he could handle the bills alone for a month or so if he worked as many extra hours as he could get.

"Just for future reference, save your private heartache for the third or fourth date."

In September, olive trees and bougainvillea were peaking across the county, and the famed multiplier effect of manufacturing—one factory job can produce six ancillary ones—was humming away in reverse. Food-stamp applications had increased fifteen per cent in the past year. The number of people visiting the local soup kitchen, Loaves and Fishes, had grown by half. For George John, the seventy-nine-year-old director of Loaves and Fishes, another figure was more striking: the number of people seeking help in finding a job had risen a hundred per cent. Even the county's greyhounds were underemployed, Valley Race Park having forsaken live racing for most of the year in favor of simulcasts from Phoenix and Tucson. This bothered veteran bettors, who couldn't watch the dogs relieve themselves before the races, a supposed indicator of their eagerness to run. It was harder on the greyhounds. Some people said that it would have been more humane to do what they've done in Juárez, across the border—just build an incinerator next to the track.

Life often looks unpromising at the end of a Rio Grande Valley summer, with its flooding, swarms of virus-bearing mosquitoes, and the particular pungency, when the air is still, of the eight hundred thousand smoldering tires. The economy usually improves in late fall, when thousands of working-class retirees from the Midwest and Canada arrive to hook up their R.V.s at parks named Sundance and Sunburst and Sunny Side and Sun Valley. These "Winter Texans" fleeing Northern climates are crucial to Cameron County's economy, though few are affluent enough to pay for hotel rooms. Being elderly, they often seek medical treatment and sometimes wind up in adult day care, one industry that is booming in the Valley, with at least two hundred facilities in operation.

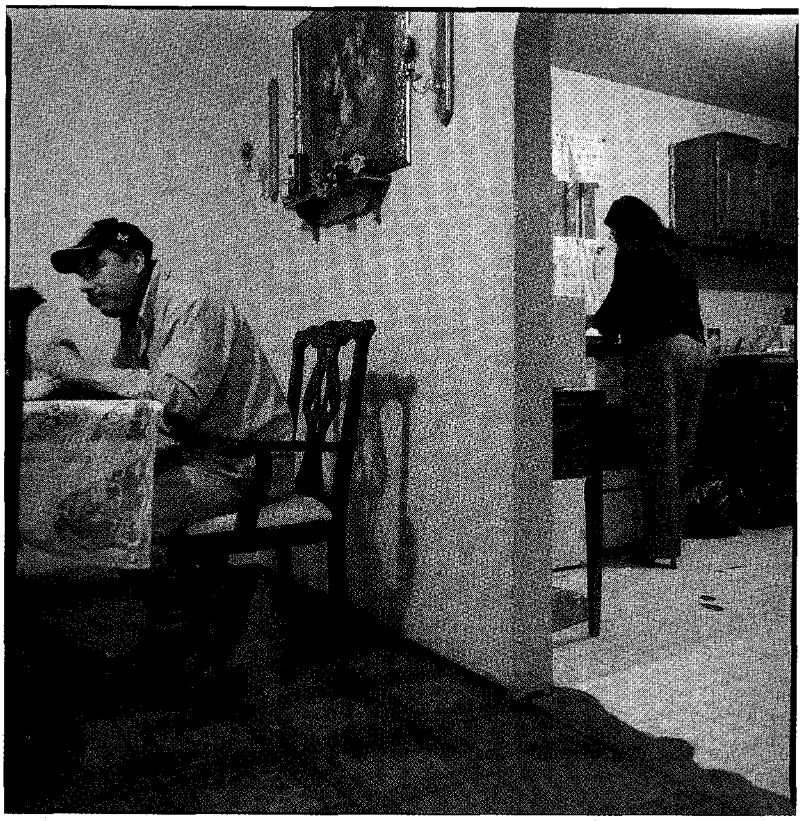
Despite billboards along Interstate 77 proclaiming Cameron County's affection for Winter Texans (and alternating billboards that say, "Open MRIs!," "Action Physical Therapy," and "Your Heart, Your Life, Our Passion"), once crowded R.V. parks were forty per cent empty this season. The old union workers whose retirement packages allowed them three months of leisure were dying off, and the next generation of retired workers seemed to be going elsewhere, or staying home. Winter Texans could still be glimpsed across the county, dancing in natty suits and spangled dresses. But they could also be seen behind the register at Circle K or Wal-Mart—the older ex-factory workers competing with younger ex-factory workers for jobs.

Fewer Winter Texans meant fewer medical-assistant opportunities for Lupita Sanchez. Even Valley Baptist Hospital, one of the county's largest and steadiest private employers, had unexpectedly begun to reduce staff. But Lupita, taking Sandra to the doctor one day, was buoyed to see one of her former classmates working in the office. The two women compared notes, identifying two other medical-assistant graduates who had found jobs in their field. One was hired by a doctor friend. The other found a job by moving to Austin.

More than half of the county's former textile workers had turned down the offer of retraining—many because they couldn't feed their families on the unemployment benefits they'd get while going to school. Texas is known for its austerity to the unemployed; a laid-off textile worker with three children might receive only a hundred and sixty-six dollars a week in benefits. If his benefits expire before he finds work, he can temporarily collect welfare; at an average of forty-four dollars a week, it is one of the lowest assistance rates in the nation.

Lupita's friends who did make the necessary financial sacrifices to educate themselves were increasingly worried that their investments might fail to pay out. Alicia, one of Lupita's former co-workers, completed computer training and went to work as a grocery-store cashier—part time, no benefits. Aracely, a medical-assistant classmate, took a restaurant job. Becky, from Levi's, worked at a hospital, cleaning floors; Roberto, also from Levi's, went back to Mexico to fix up and sell junk cars. Another former co-worker sold picture frames door-to-door. And Lupita was loading two ice chests' worth of food into the family's Dodge Intrepid, to sell to other low-paid laborers who wanted a cheap, home-cooked lunch.

The construction sites that Lupita visited were piled with tile and plywood, and were tricky to negotiate while lugging the ice chests. But there was one site where she barely felt the physical strain: Behind a tall iron fence rose beautiful red-roofed *españolas*—homes with verandas and soaring vaulted doorways. And behind those *españolas* lay another fortified gate, which opened out into a congregation of half-built, four-story homes that soared even higher. Lupita's brother Lázaro, coming once to gawk, had been quickly driven off by the police. But someone peddling lunch to the laborers had license to look. The homes had twenty-five-foot windows, wrought-iron balconies, and verandas on every side and at every level. In front of one house, thirty-two Christmas trees edged the lawn. Houses for surgeons and lawyers, Lupita imagined.



Sergio Sanchez had expected to get fifty dollars a day for roofing work.

The houses, among the finest in the county, made Lupita ponder something the priest had said one Sunday at Mass: "We think too much about what we want, and too little about what we need." She and Sergio had wanted to build a room for their son, who shared his parents' bed. The family could survive without a separate bedroom for Luis Ángel, Lupita thought, so it wasn't, technically, a need. It was just the faintest of wantings.

In Cameron Park there's a saying: "I need to make enough to hold my house." Family and home are sentimentalized here—a consolation for labor-market caprice. The neighborhood, four blocks from the construction site, might lack street lights, but it had impressive houses, too. The nicest belonged to a woman named Elida Greenwood, who, in addition to owning the buildings that house two adult-day-care centers, was the neighborhood's leading buyer and seller of land. When she sold a plot, she negotiated the mortgage-payment terms and schedules, without the involvement of banks, in an arrangement known as "seller-take-back." In a state where seventy-one per cent of the residents don't have a checking account, let alone good credit, seller-take-back is a crucial niche in the real-estate market—one that had been of service to Lupita's mother, María Villarreal.

María's husband had died of a heart attack a week after the birth of their eighth child. Now, at fifty-nine, she was working as a maid and earning six dollars and twenty-five cents an hour, while helping to support her own mother, who was still working at the age of eighty. María was also raising three grandchildren, who had been orphaned when Lupita's sister died, of cancer, at the age of thirty-six. To house her family, María, in 1992, had bought a tiny lot from Elida Greenwood. The price was nine thousand dollars, with a twelve-per-cent interest rate. On María's land, Sergio and Lázaro installed a small wooden house, which they painted periwinkle blue.

María's work came through a temporary agency that provided housework assistance for the elderly. Between assignments, she met her monthly obligation to Elida by doing odd jobs or by leaving her grandchildren with relatives and heading to Arkansas to work at a Tyson-chicken slaughterhouse. After years of this, her face was drawn and bunions protruded from her cheap canvas shoes, but she was four thousand dollars shy of owning her land in full. Then, during a yearlong stint at the Arkansas slaughterhouse, she fell ill—a "big pulling," she described it, in the heart. Sergio and Lázaro found her in an Ozarks hospital and took her home.

Eventually, María returned to her maid's schedule, but for at least two years she did not make mortgage payments to Elida Greenwood. Lupita and her siblings, María knew, had monthly land payments and financial hardships of their own, and she kept her difficulties to herself. So Lupita learned of her mother's straits only after Elida had taken back María's property, which left María and her grandchildren living in a house on land they didn't own. Lupita went to see Elida Greenwood. She no longer had savings, so she had no choice. Taking out another seller-take-back loan, she helped buy back the land, at twice the original price. She blamed herself for not anticipating her mother's predicament. In Texas people say, "He who has, gets."

Social meliorists sometimes indulge an idle thought: Wouldn't it be fairer if the worst jobs paid the most—if toilet cleaners and garbagemen earned more than restaurant critics and ambassadors to balmy islands? Manufacturing jobs—hard and monotonous but decently remunerated—are as close to this notion as modern American labor gets. But in the past five years nearly twenty per cent of those jobs have vanished from the United States economy.

The early-twentieth-century economist Joseph Schumpeter, whose parents owned a textile factory and profited handsomely from it, coined a term, “creative destruction,” that has become an idée fixe in contemporary American economics. Only by dismantling outmoded industries like textiles and diverting workers to creative new enterprises will America increase its wealth, and Americans improve their living standards. As Schumpeter recognized, the continuous process of creative destruction is attended by considerable stress, especially for laborers on the destruction side of the equation.

Sandra and Silvia Sanchez felt they were part of the American middle class.

MAGNUM

But in Cameron County worker stress didn't necessarily lead to political support for tariffs and import quotas—or to resentment of the countries where the jobs went. The county's Fruit of the Loom workers made about four hundred dollars a week. Honduran textile workers make less than seventy-five dollars a week, and protest at their peril, because Chinese textile workers make seventy-five dollars a month. Cameron County residents tend to accept the ineluctability of this math. Many have seen their own relatives in Mexico improve their families' living standards while earning in a week what American workers earn in a day. And, by the time a community has been whipsawed by the decision-making of a dozen of what John Kerry calls “corporate Benedict Arnolds,” those companies stop looking like traitors and start to look like American business archetypes.

Workers' distress stemmed instead from their experience of the bipartisan retraining solution: too many displaced workers were being trained for too few decent jobs. This disequilibrium helps explain an unsettling finding by Texas state evaluators: The most common employment found by those who receive intensive federal training is temporary work—which also happens to be the most common employment found by displaced workers who receive no training at all.

But, as George Bush explained to a group of North Carolina's displaced textile workers one day this past November, the Schumpeterian process requires patience: “As the economy changes, as technology changes, the slowest part of change is the workforce. And we've just got to understand that we've got to make sure our workers—who are the most productive in the world, the hardest-working people in the world, the finest people in the world—have the skills necessary to move on with their lives. . . . There's a wonderful, wonderful future ahead for people who at this moment may think the future is a little dark.”

As if on cue, a happy prospect arose in Cameron County, courtesy of Boeing, the American aviation company. Boeing, which is based in Chicago, had announced that it would begin manufacturing a superefficient new jet, the 7E7 Dreamliner, and Texas wanted to be the place where it was made. Governor Rick Perry was offering incentives, and San Antonio and Houston had been suggested as suitable spots. To the astonishment of all concerned, Boeing asked for more information about only one place in the state: Cameron County, which had the advantages of ship ports and airports and the least expensive labor.

It seemed odd to some that Boeing, which over the previous two years had laid off thirty thousand people, might resuscitate a city fifteen hundred miles away. But desperation supplies its own plausibility. Plotting grew thick at the Las Vegas Café, where the mayor of Harlingen, Connie de la Garza, and other players in county politics met five mornings a week at dawn—all wearing clothes with “Made in America” labels—for gossip and huevos rancheros.

Mayor de la Garza, who is sixty-one, had recently fallen out of a deer blind, badly injuring his arm, but even in pain he managed to maintain a cheerleader's mien. (“Our new call center will bring us a thousand new jobs, and good jobs. Right now is an exciting time to be in South Texas!”) Still, Valley men pride themselves on their ability to make ass-elbow distinctions, and the Mayor, a native of the county, let the bluster drop when he was with his breakfast buddies. These were disheartening times, and the county needed something like Boeing.

At the Mayor's side was David Allex, who had headed Harlingen's chamber of commerce for decades. A former high-school football star with a bald head and a late-Roman girth, Allex, who is sixty-seven, had in the old days lured Fruit of the Loom, Levi's, and many of the other mills to the Valley. The closing of those factories didn't affect the personal finances of Mayor de la Garza or Allex, as creative destruction generates profitable turnover in real estate, a profession they shared. In fact, Allex, who would soon get the listing for the Fruit of the Loom factory, was having his best year ever, despite a break for heart surgery. Nonetheless, the mill closings distressed him: "The twelve-per-cent unemployment hurts, but the statistic that gets under my skin even more is that forty per cent of the people who have jobs are underemployed."

The Mayor and his friends had been pursuing biotech and other forward-looking industries. But although industrial real-estate prices had fallen, none of the former textile buildings had found a job-generating new occupant, even one of a backward-looking stripe. When county economic-development specialists sought strategic advice from officials in cities that had lost factories in the nineteen-nineties, they came away further distressed. The leaders of cities like Buffalo and Lowell and Canton were still looking for answers themselves.

A few years back, when Allex made the case for opening a factory in Cameron County, he knew whom he was trying to beat: first, the Northeasterners, then the Carolinians, then the Mexicans. But now the potential competition included China, Pakistan, Slovakia, Nicaragua, and Bangladesh. Boeing represented a reassuring restoration of old rules. Since the company relied heavily on Pentagon contracts, it was politically obliged to keep its jet manufacturing in the United States. Thus Cameron County could use its economic distress as a bargaining chip. By any standard, it had one of the youngest, most underutilized workforces in the nation.

High-tech corporations had once countered that the area's willing workers were illiterate in two languages. But thousands of retrained workers like Lupita Sanchez gave the Mayor and his men crucial evidence to the contrary. The Mayor said, "We used to have to say to Lockheed Martin and those other corporations, 'Look, just take a chance on us,' but now we've got the statistics right here." With his good arm, he rapped the table. "These are adaptable, trainable people. And loyal—look at all those folks who worked at Levi's for thirty years. Once you hire them, they're yours." In addition, Cameron County schools seemed to be producing more able graduates than they had in the past. This is in part because, in an unstable economy, teaching has become a sought-after and relatively lucrative job, although the loss of the tax-paying mills was forcing those teachers to do more with less. Many students, upon graduation, enter the military. (Last year, three soldiers from Cameron County were killed in Iraq.) Others find a way to attend a four-year college, but most promptly join the local labor pool.

"The low cost of living—that's the other thing we have that other U.S. cities don't," Mayor de la Garza was saying. "Low crime, too, and good quality of life. We're an easygoing people, we're a good place for outdoor types, the food is great, we have local theatre, and sometimes travelling companies come from New York." His companions stared at their eggs. "Well, we're not Chicago," the Mayor conceded. He rose from the table—he had real-estate business to attend to. "Anyway, the model that's relevant is San Antonio"—two hundred and fifty miles away. "They got Toyota to come there, and only two years later we can feel the effects all the way out here in the Valley. One company, just one, and the whole region feels completely different."

In downtown Brownsville, in December, signs on telephone poles read, "Telephone poles for sale." Lupita found a five-dollar-and-fifteen-cent-an-hour job—temporary and minimum wage, but more than she was making in her lunch business—stocking shelves and working the register at a dollar store during the Christmas rush. Middle-class Mexicans once came to Brownsville on weekends to spend their disposable income, but declining Mexican wages and a steady devaluation of the peso have cut into sales. Moreover, a Wal-Mart superstore has opened across the border, in Matamoros, offering the same merchandise you can get in the States, but cheaper, plus thirty-four varieties of tequila. This was grim news for downtown Brownsville's already depressed array of commercial establishments (the Superior $1.00 Mart, the Everything's $1.00 Superstore, and the Superior 99-Cent Place), but the store where Lupita found work, which specialized in Chinese-made children's toys, household goods, and Christmas decorations, had a loyal clientele.

In addition to the chatter of a thousand daily customers and carols blasted from loudspeakers behind the cash registers, Christmas lights played demonically overlapping versions of "Jingle Bells." Lupita, her glossy hair in a twist and with a roll of masking tape on her wrist, hustled through aisles trying to restore Super-Cyberheroes and Happy Family doll houses to their rightful shelves. She was coming down with the flu, and the pockets of her dark slacks were stuffed with Kleenex. She'd had no response from the last four places she'd applied to. She had just received a ticket for expired license tags on the Intrepid, which would consume every cent of the next two weeks' pay. But these miseries weren't what really shook her: the week that she found this job, Sergio announced that he had been laid off.

Compared with downtown Brownsville, the Port of Brownsville was prospering. Steel was coming in from Venezuela and Brazil and Japan, and iron ore, too—3.65 million tons of cargo a year. The port's largest employer is Amfels, an American subsidiary of a Singapore-based conglomerate. Amfels also took on military projects whose details seemed to be known by every aspiring blue-collar worker in Cameron Park, and a rough indicator of its corporate health could be sighted from miles away. Suspended from a hydraulic hoist two hundred feet off the ground—circled by white-faced ibis, Caspian terns, and low-flying pelicans—was giant oil-drilling machinery. An abomination to many environmentalists, oil-industry equipment in the sky was, to Sergio and his friends, the augury of a paycheck. Few were lucky enough to be employed directly by Amfels, but the temporary jobs with its many subcontractors were considered good. The urgency of getting oil rigs back to the Persian Gulf, or submarines back under water, provided laborers with twelve-hour workdays. But the hoist in the sky was empty now, which meant that the incomes of the temporary workers sank to zero.

Sergio went to see a previous employer, a roofing subcontractor. A prominent development company, Casa Linda, was hiring at one of the construction sites where Lupita had sold her lunches. The last time Sergio worked as a roofer, two years ago, the going rate in Cameron County was eighty dollars a day. Now Sergio had heard that the Casa Linda subcontractor was offering fifty dollars, in cash, and Lupita had been told by the workers that those cash payments could be erratic. Nonetheless, fifty dollars was better than the forty dollars that Sergio had been offered at another construction site. It was assumed that, if he wouldn't work for so little, there were many illegal immigrants who would.

Although the natural border between Mexico and the United States, the Rio Grande, was now so depleted that one could walk between countries without dampening one's shoes, the official border was more fiercely defended than ever. But the border guards were outmatched by a surging number of Mexican nationals seeking to escape their own depressed economy. NAFTA, which had given Mexico a preferential trading arrangement with the United States, had been superseded by global deals that favored China and other countries. And in just three years a quarter of a million Mexican manufacturing jobs had disappeared. Among those jobs were several thousand at Mexico-based Fruit of the Loom factories. One Fruit of the Loom mill, in the impoverished town of Valle Hermosa, appeared to be down to a single employee, a security guard, whose backup was a mutt named Elmer.

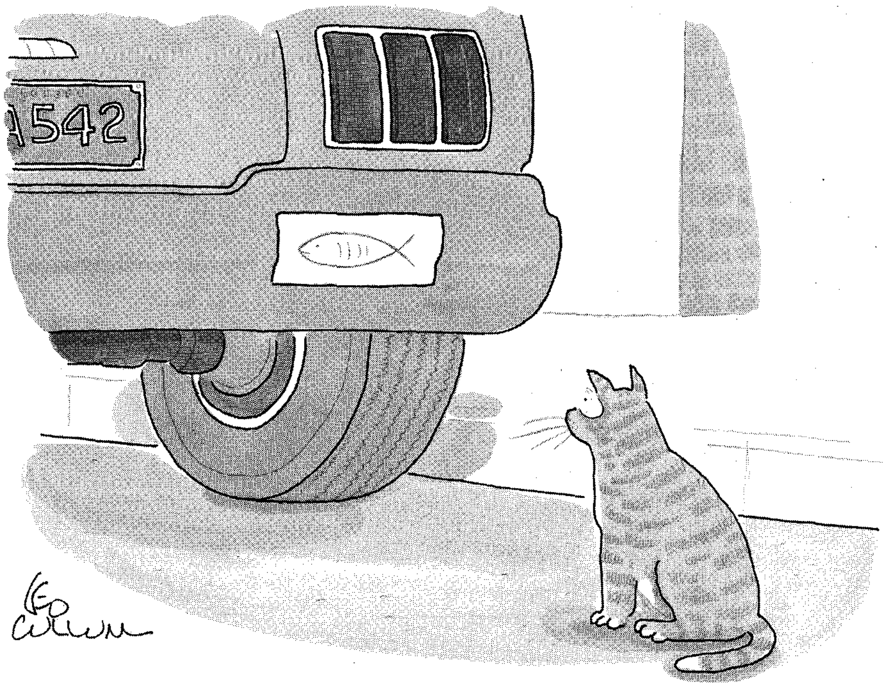
Lupita and Sergio, like many other residents, had considered leaving Cameron County; in a flexible economy, labor migrates with capital. The owner of a local Italian restaurant argued that there was money in Dallas. An architect who earned five thousand dollars last year thought Houston might be the place. Even Rapid-Response Mario—whose job with the county was not in the civil service but on a subcontract—felt that in Cameron County he had no chance of making what he had heard on the radio was America's median family income: forty-two thousand dollars. "I've got some education, so I'm luckier than a lot of people here," he said. "But when I think of my little girl I panic—it's like the Valley is a trap." He'd heard that things were better in Austin.

But in a family-centered culture it was hard to leave. There were elderly relatives across the border and down the street who depended on one's support. There was the flute teacher who noticed the passion for Bach in one's quiet daughter, and the parish priest who noticed everything else. And there was one's house, the repository of great investment and labor, whose sale in hard economic times would not be advantageous.

"I think if I was some big deal," Lupita said, "if I had a talent that could make a future with some bigness, it would be easier to say, 'Yes, we'll go.' And I confess there are times I get tired of my family here, having to be involved in every little thing. But to separate ourselves, and put the girls in a strange place when they're doing well here—to chase after an eight-dollar-an-hour job in a new place that might also disappear, leaving us to live in the same hard way?" Better to watch the television news vigilantly, so that Sergio might be among the first to apply when Boeing came to town. Like David Allex and Mayor de la Garza, she had invested in Cameron County for the long term.

One evening, after cooking for the construction workers and her family, Lupita ceded the kitchen to Silvia and two of her friends. Barefoot and intent, they boiled a stew of cornstarch and water, added it to individual pans that held the juices of grapes, tomatoes, pineapple, carrots, and oranges, then seasoned their concoctions with an eyedropper's worth of iodine. "First, we've got to titrate the ascorbic-acid standard," Silvia informed her mother; her science project was due the following week. Ordinarily, Lupita shuddered to see her girls at the sink and the stove. Though she had tutored them in the Catholic catechism and in dance steps for *cumbia* and *guapango* music, she had withheld from them her domestic competence, for reasons that she didn't fully understand.

The girls soon retreated to Silvia and Sandra's bedroom to spread their data recordings out on a bed. Though most of the tiny room was a shrine to second-tier boy bands, one corner had been cleared for a Mexican computer—a remnant of more affluent days. From the hallway, Lupita watched the girls work for a minute, then reached for Luis, who was wearing cardboard Spy Kids glasses and complaining that he liked Silvia better when she played him Christmas carols than when she played with her friends. Lupita's neighbors sometimes gossiped that her chil-



dren were growing up too innocent, unable to fend for themselves. About this, Lupita didn't worry.

As Christmas neared, the newspapers predicted a full-bore recovery, and the state of Texas, citing budgetary constraints, phased out subsidized health coverage for a hundred thousand low-income children. Texas has the nation's highest proportion of children and adults who lack health insurance, in part because of the prevalence of temporary work. It also has high death rates from diabetes, cervical cancer, and other treatable illnesses. Lupita's sister Juana died of cervical cancer a few years ago; in the two years between her diagnosis and her barely palliated death, she was shut out of the many for-profit hospitals and medical facilities in Cameron County. While federal law requires those hospitals to treat the uninsured in emergencies—gunshot wounds, heart attacks—the institutions usually decline to accept uninsured supplicants who need chemotherapy, radiation, or other longer-term treatments. Juana, like most uninsured patients with advanced cancer from Cameron County, had to travel back and forth to the state public hospital in Galveston. It is an eleven-hour bus trip each way.

Juana's death was another instance in which Lupita regretted her lack of eloquence. "I am angry at myself for not doing all I could," she said. "I am angry at Juana for leaving her children, and angry at the suffering my mother went through—so much anger I do not like to bring it to my tongue. But maybe if you could get these things out the right way they wouldn't so badly haunt and hound your head."

The Galveston hospital radically cut the number of uninsured patients it will see, while hiking fees for treatment. In such a health-care climate, flu is treated with tea from chaparral bushes; depression is addressed with a passionflower-and-skullcap herbal concoction that tastes like shoe polish, only worse. It is not unusual to find male residents buying pregnancy tests at the drugstore, for their own use. Rumors have spread that human growth hormone in men's urine is a sign of prostate cancer. A six-dollar pregnancy kit, which tests for the hormone, is cheaper than a doctor.

Over dinner at Lupita's one evening, Juana's daughter, who is fourteen, mentioned a favorite teacher. She said, "You know how Mr. Alonso is kind of crazy, always saying controversial things? Well, today he told us, 'What I wish for all of you is that, when you graduate, I never see you again.' And some of the kids in the class got all offended. But then he explained, and it was cool. He just wants us to go out and learn that there are places in the world that aren't like Cameron County."

"Don't force me to invoke my rights of primogeniture."

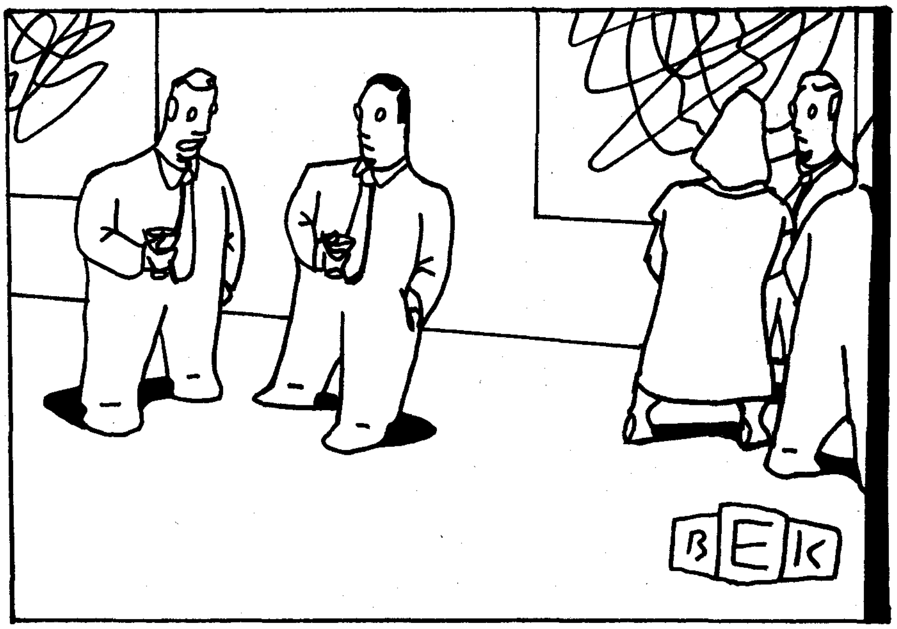
By late fall, it was clear that Boeing's Dreamliner was unlikely to transform the county's economy. Two of the company's top officers departed after one of them was caught recruiting a Pentagon official who oversaw military contracts. It was the culmination of a bad year, in which it was revealed that the company had filched inside information on a competitor's bid and leased jet tankers to the government at exorbitant cost, while worker layoffs mounted. Just before Christmas, the new Boeing C.E.O. announced that Everett, Washington, had won the competition for the Dreamliner's manufacture.

When Lupita and her friends failed to get a job they wanted, they often internalized responsibility—pinpointing their own deficits of personality or skill. And so it was for the workers at Fruit of the Loom when the Levi's and Haggar and Converse factories were closing all around them. They began to cut and dye and dry faster—so fast that by the time the closing was announced their machines were overheating and breaking down. It was difficult for them to conceive that far away, in corporate offices, things had moved faster still: that Michael Milken had facilitated a leveraged buyout of Fruit of the Loom on behalf of a C.E.O. who a dozen years later pocketed forty million dollars in compensation while sales fell, moved headquarters to the Cayman Islands, and eventually filed for bankruptcy. When Warren Buffett subsequently acquired Fruit of the Loom, the news sparked applause on the Cameron County shop floor. Buffett, workers had heard, was *smart.* They did not anticipate that a smart businessman might consider the global market and the opinions of his shareholders and take their workplace out from under them. The newly unemployed Fruit of the Loomers didn't blame Buffett, whose company would soon report doubled profits. That was just the way the system worked.

Sergio had no complaints, either, although his fifty-dollar-a-day roofing job was wearing him out. Casa Linda, the site's developer, had hired two other subcontractors in addition to Sergio's unit, in the hope of creating competition. It was a practice common in Central America: the subcontractors who finished their homes fastest would get another home to do. After a week of racing across roofs, laden with shingles, Sergio was so spent that it took him a moment to register the contents of his pay envelope. He had received half of what he'd expected.

At this, Lupita's supple capacity for tolerance found its snapping point. "You were pale as porcelain once, but now such laboring has you red and black from the sun," she said to her husband. "And, believe me, this isn't about 'Oh, my poor Sergio, I love you so much.' Even if I didn't like you, this wouldn't be right. People know we are in need, and they abuse us because they think we will just take it. I know there may come a day when we have to bend to that pressure, but I can make what little we have last longer, and we will not bend today. We have to say there is a limit, and beyond this our family will not go."

But they still had to make monthly payments on both their land and María's land, and the sixty-six-dollar insurance policy on their house and on Sergio's life. And there were seven payments left on Silvia's flute. A week later, Sergio reported back to work.



"It's a little too early to tell, but I think this new Internet porn site I've been going to is going to be the one for me."

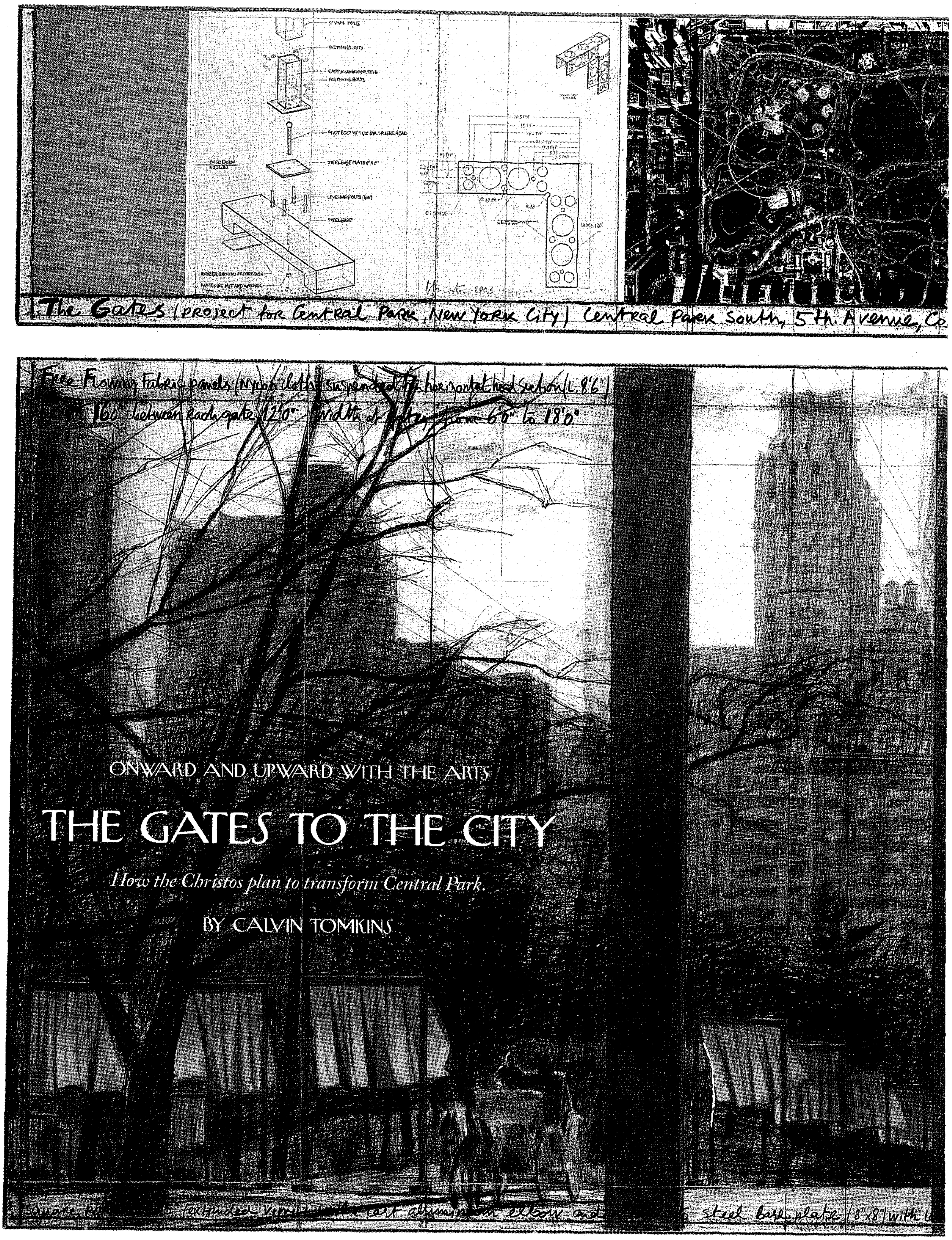
In Cameron Park, the highlight of the holiday season occurred one weekday at three in the morning. In continuation of Mexican peasant tradition, and in defiance of a chilling rain, three hundred people gathered in the unlit streets outside San Felipe de Jesús Church to make a three-mile penitential march across the county. At neighborhood churches elsewhere, similar crowds embarked on similar processions, each group headed toward the patronal church at the center of Brownsville for a daybreak Mass. Local children anticipated the procession for the sheer deliciousness of running miles through the streets in the middle of the night. Teen-agers liked the shirtless Mexican musicians who led the march and whose ankle bells jangled as they pranced. But the faithful marched to honor the Virgin of Guadalupe, Lupita's namesake. The Virgin of Guadalupe was said to have appeared in a vision to a poor man on a Mexican hillside. Overcome by her tenderness, the man trekked across the city to the palace of the bishop to testify to the miracle he'd beheld. There, he was rebuked and disbelieved until the Virgin's image materialized on his cloak. At this, the bishop fell to his knees, ordering that a temple be erected in her name.

In the dark, the families of Cameron Park passed the gated community where Lupita sold lunches, and another community where trees had been espaliered and scissored into cubes and spheres, and where a halogen-lit fountain shot streams of water up into the rain. Between the ankle bells and the thunder, the priest tried to tell his parish what he thought was the meaning of the Guadalupe story. "It's not about getting yourself a temple," he said. "It is about having the courage to bring what you've seen to the palace—to the powerful, to the institutions strong enough not just to hear your story but to address it." The priest's notion that some power, somewhere, might acknowledge and salve the sufferings of his flock did not, this wet night, catch a spark. The group shuffled forward, mouthing three hundred private prayers.

As the new year began, a skeleton crew of Fruit of the Loomers, aided by "confidential document destruction" workers from a company called Lone Star Shredding, attended to the factory's final clean-out. George Bush called the pace of recent economic growth the fastest in nearly twenty years. The Cameron County employment agency laid off a sixth of its employees because of state and federal budget cuts, and Rapid-Response Mario decided to enroll at the local training college alongside many of the employees he had helped. Computer maintenance looked promising, he thought.

Silvia took first prize at the school science fair, and Lupita's temporary dollar-store job ended just before the repayments on her medical-assistance-training loan began. She thought she could keep her skills sharp by volunteering to do blood-pressure testings after Mass. Sergio's temporary roof job ended, too. Unable to find new employment that paid even minimum wage, he applied for work in Corpus Christi. The city was three hours away by bus, but Amfels had openings there, at nine dollars an hour.

Since they had married, fifteen years earlier, Sergio had left Lupita and the children only once, to do migrant work in Ohio. He was so lonely that he lasted only a month, a fact that had pleased his wife immeasurably. But sentiment had no value when you couldn't hold your house. Sergio feared he would have to leave. Lupita tried to find the big, round words to tell the children. ♦


5" VINYL POLE
FASTENING NUTS
CAST ALUMINUM SLEEVE
FASTENING BOLTS
PIVOT BOLT W/ 1 1/2" DIA SPHERE HEAD
STEEL BASE PLATE 8" X 8"
LEVELING BOLTS (3/8")
STEEL BASE
RUBBER GROUND PROTECTION
FASTENING NUT AND WASHER
Christo 2003
The Gates (Project for Central Park, New York City) Central Park South, 5th Avenue, Co
Free Flowing Fabric panels (Nylon cloth) suspended from horizontal head section (L. 8'6")
16' between each gate 12'0" width of gates from 6'0" to 18'0"
square ... extruded vinyl ... with cast aluminum elbow and ... steel base plate (8'x8') with

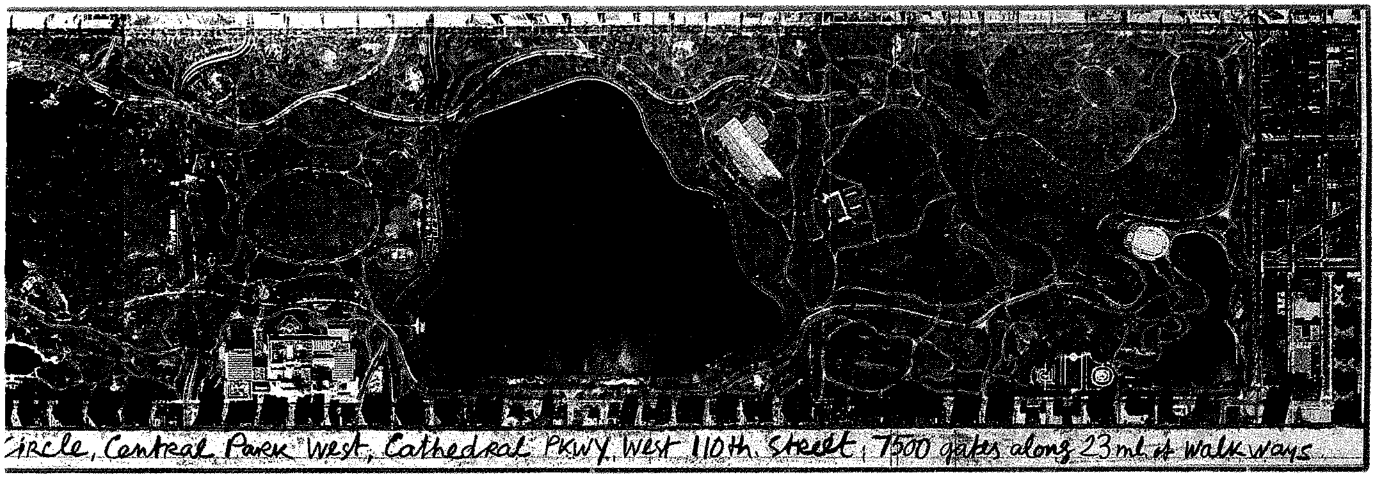
ONWARD AND UPWARD WITH THE ARTS

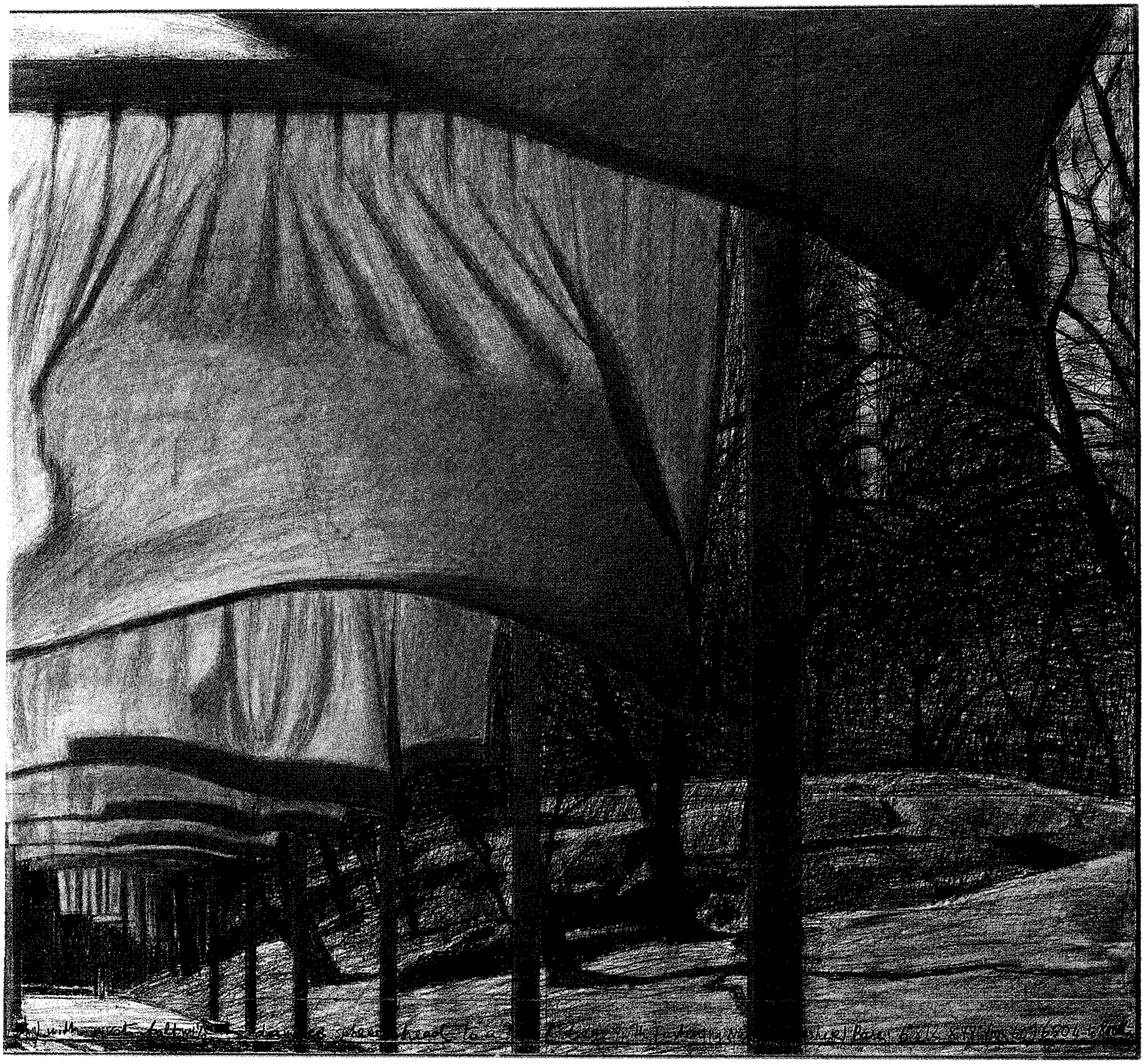
THE GATES TO THE CITY

How the Christos plan to transform Central Park.

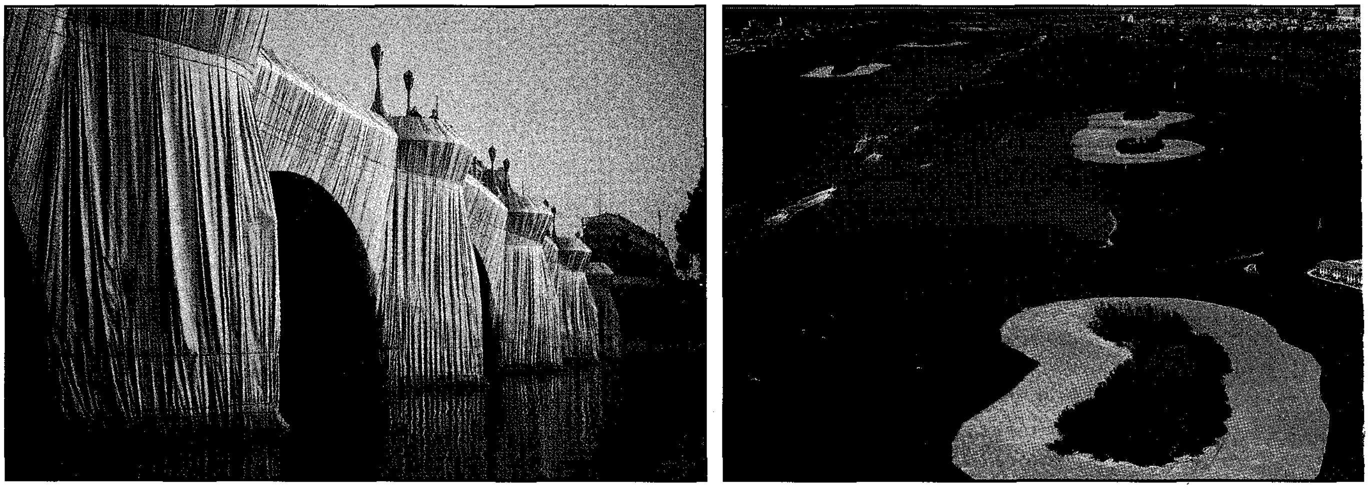
BY CALVIN TOMKINS

"The Gates, Project for Central Park, New York City": seventy-five hundred gates are set along twenty-three miles of paths. "


ircle, Central Park West, Cathedral PKWY, West 110th Street, 7500 gates along 23 ml of walkways



oject is ceremonial, it is festive, it is very invitational, and in the same way very private," Christo says.



Late November in Central Park, an afternoon of brilliant sun and boreal winds. I am with Christo and Jeanne-Claude, the artist-entrepreneurs, who have agreed to show me some of the sites for "The Gates," their long-delayed Central Park project. Although "The Gates" won't go up until next February, preparations for it have been going on since before January, 2003, when Mayor Michael Bloomberg, reversing twenty-two years of official opposition to the plan, called a special press conference to announce that the city had signed a contract with the artists. Christo, who is sixty-eight, wears a roomy black coat that fails to disguise or contain his lean, hyperactive frame, and he carries a black canvas bag containing fifty-two rolled-up maps of the Park, each showing a specific sector in detail. Jeanne-Claude, his wife, also sixty-eight (they both were born on June 13, 1935), has on a full-length down overcoat, but what one notices first is her bright-orange hair. We enter the Park at Fifty-ninth Street and Fifth Avenue, and as we head north Christo grabs my arm and tells me to look up at the lampposts.

"Our gates will be five feet higher than those," he says. Sixteen feet high, in other words. There will be seventy-five hundred of them, placed at twelve-foot intervals along twenty-three miles of the Park's pedestrian paths, each gate consisting of two solid vinyl uprights and a horizontal vinyl crossbar, from which a length of saffron-colored woven nylon cloth will hang down to a foot or so above the height of a tall person's head. Set in motion by the wind, the fabric, as Christo describes it, will be like "a golden river appearing and disappearing through the bare branches of the trees." The steel bases for "The Gates" are scheduled to be installed in January, 2005, and then, early in February, about five hundred and fifty paid workers will elevate the gate assemblies and, on a single day, unfurl the seventy-five hundred fabric panels. All this is going to cost somewhere in the vicinity of twenty million dollars, every penny of which is being raised from the sale of Christo's drawings and collages of the project and other, earlier works by Christo, from the nineteen-fifties and sixties. "The Gates" will exist for sixteen days, after which the Christo battalions will move in to start the removal process.

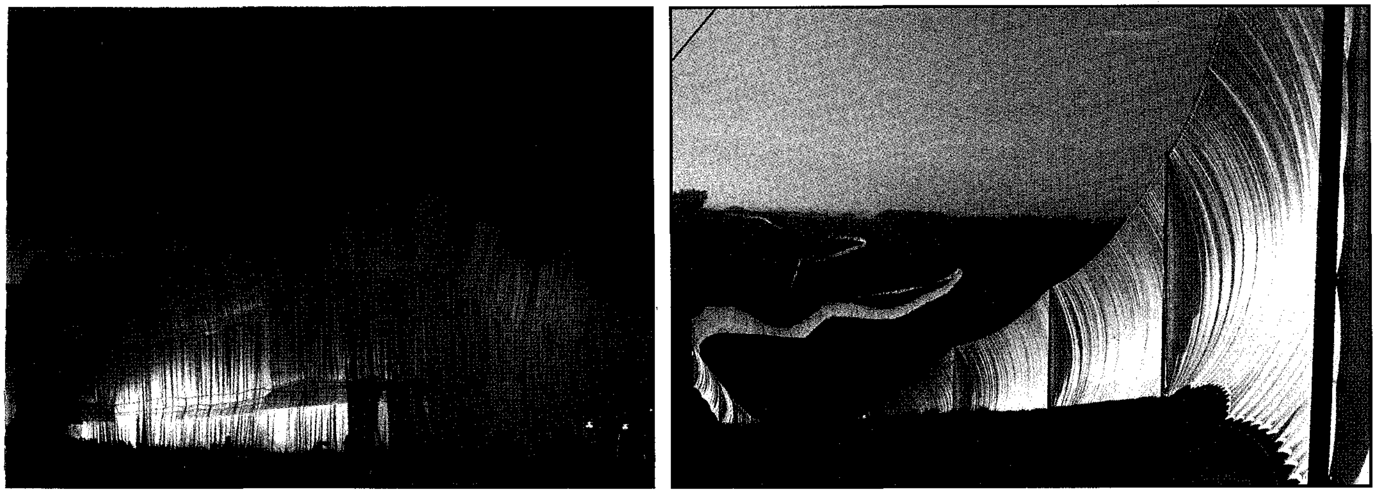
Christo extracts a map from his bag and spreads it out on a park bench. "This is where we are now," he says. "See, each gate is marked on the map. Here the path is very wide, so we use our widest gates—eighteen feet. The smallest ones are six feet wide, on very narrow paths." Jeanne-Claude points out a tree with an overhanging branch that is lower than sixteen feet. "This means an interruption in the gates," she says, "because we are not going to cut any branches."

A little farther along is the entrance to the zoo. Christo says that they are not going to put gates in that section, "because of all those man-made structures. We don't put them at the Bethesda Fountain, either, or anyplace where there is too much architecture and decorative ornament." Turning left, Christo takes a path that leads across the East Drive and down to the Pond. There are quite a few strollers out, braving the cold weather. Christo and Jeanne-Claude call my attention to the paths that branch off from or run parallel to the one we're on. They want me to visualize several rows of gates, all visible at the same time. "In back of you," Jeanne-Claude says, "coming from there, a long row of gates, and in front of you, and over there." Christo stops, kneels on the ground, and unrolls a new map to demonstrate our exact location. Jeanne-Claude spots an egret, standing motionless on one leg in shallow water across the Pond. "It doesn't move," she says. "It must be wood." "No, *chérie*," Christo says. "It moves." "O.K., so it's real," Jeanne-Claude says. "Let's go."

We circle back to the Fifty-ninth Street entrance to the Park and walk to a black chauffeur-driven car, which is waiting for us in front of the Pierre, on Fifth Avenue. Christo and Jeanne-Claude both give directions to the driver, talking over each other and confusing him. When clarity is restored, the car takes us west, to Columbus Circle, where we get out and reënter the Park. Paths of different widths lead off in all directions, and I am again instructed to visualize rows and rows of gates. As we make our way deeper into the Park, Christo says that the light in February will be like it is now—low light with long shadows. "When the sun comes through it, the fabric becomes yellow-gold," Jeanne-Claude says. "You can see that in Christo's drawings." I ask how they decided on the saffron color for the fabric.

PREVIOUS SPREAD: © CHRISTO 2003. © CHRISTO: 1985; WOLFGANG VOLZ, 1983; WOLFGANG VOLZ, 1995; 1976

From left: "The Pont Neuf Wrapped, Paris, 1975-85"; "Surrounded Islands, Biscayne Bay, Greater Miami, Florida, 1980-8



Jeanne-Claude says that the original plan was to install "The Gates" in October or November, when the fall colors are at their height. "If you look at the colors of the autumn foliage," she says, "and then squint your eyes, you see saffron."

"But not only that," Christo says, interrupting. "We find this color is so spectacular with the silvery-gray color of the naked branches."

"The color will change all the time, in different lights, as it does with all our projects," Jeanne-Claude adds. "Mainly, we both just love this color. Are you freezing? I'm going to call." She summons the driver on her walkie-talkie, and tells him to meet us at Seventy-second Street and Central Park West.

If you had to name one essential quality that underlies Christo and Jeanne-Claude's career, which is unique in contemporary art, it would probably be perseverance—unbending, implacable perseverance. They have been willing to wait for years or decades to realize some of their grandiose, ephemeral, absurdly beautiful spectacles, working on two or more at a time until they get the necessary permits to go ahead with one of them. Getting permission to wrap the Reichstag, in Berlin, took them twenty-four years. Their "Pont Neuf Wrapped," in Paris, was proposed in 1975 and carried out in 1985. This is the first time they have been able to do a public work in New York City, their home since 1964. "Just think," Jeanne-Claude says, "our first project without jet lag." What made it possible after all these years was the election of Michael Bloomberg as mayor of New York. "Without Michael Bloomberg there would be no 'Gates,' " Jeanne-Claude says. "We never even approached anyone during the Giuliani administration. Why? Because we don't enjoy banging our heads against a stone wall. Henry Stern was the Parks Commissioner, and he was solidly against us.

"Each of our projects is totally different," Jeanne-Claude went on. "Probably the most difficult for us, the one we would not want to go through ever again, was the Pont Neuf. Our permit to wrap the Pont Neuf depended on two men who never agreed on anything. One was the President of France, François Mitterrand, and the other was the mayor of Paris, Jacques Chirac, who wanted to become President, and later did. There was an election coming up in 1986, and they were playing Ping-Pong with us, and we were the balls."

The car takes us to the north end of the Park, at 110th Street, where Christo leads the way in to the Harlem Meer. Saffron gates will follow the shoreline of the lake here as far as one can see, except for three gates that go out into the water—*"pouf, pouf, pouf,"* Christo says. Both artists like to point out that "The Gates" extends throughout the Park—as Jeanne-Claude puts it, "People in Harlem and Spanish Harlem will see the same work of art as people on Fifty-ninth Street." The fact that their work is so accessible is a factor in the disdain and hostility it evokes in certain quarters. It makes some critics and quite a few artists exclude them from the pantheon of serious art. Brian Sewell, the well-known London critic, dismissed even their "Wrapped Reichstag" as "a largely pointless exercise . . . which really has nothing whatsoever to do with art." At the same time, a great many non-artists simply refuse to believe that Christo and Jeanne-Claude do what they do, paying all the costs themselves, simply for the joy of doing it. "The great power of the projects is that they are absolutely irrational," Christo has said. "That drives people berserk. First, because they think it's not true. They think we have some hidden resources, that we're lying. Secondly, if it *is* true, that it is almost *imbécile*, stupid, impossible."

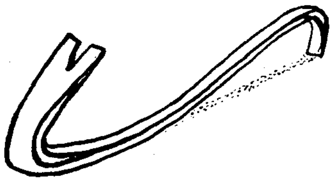
The Christos decided long ago to preserve their freedom by accepting support from no one but themselves—no sponsors, no subsidies, no grants, no patrons. It used to be thought that Christo was the artist and Jeanne-Claude was the support system, the one who kept the books, sold Christo's drawings and collages (he has never had a dealer), arranged the bank loans, paid the bills, and effectively ran the show. She does all that, to be sure, but Christo does a lot of it, too, and since 1994, when they decided to put both their names on the Reichstag project, they have made it very clear that Jeanne-Claude is and always has been the co-artist on their projects, making aesthetic decisions along with her husband. "There are only three things we do not do together," she likes to say. "I don't draw. We never fly on the same plane. And I have deprived Christo of the

Vrapped Reichstag, Berlin, 1971-95"; "Running Fence, Sonoma and Marin Counties, California, 1972-76."

pleasure of talking with our accountant."

It was Jeanne-Claude who, in 1980, when they were invited to do a project in Miami, came up with the idea of floating fabric "skirts" around some of the uninhabited islands in Biscayne Bay. The idea led, in 1983, to "Surrounded Islands," whose flamingo-pink fabric panels and delicate interaction of land, water, and sky made it the most feminine of all their projects. "I was not an artist when I married Christo, but I became one," she told me. "If Christo had been a dentist, I would have become a dentist." They have been together for forty-five years. When they appear at public hearings on their projects (which they do all the time, and which they consider part of their aesthetic process), Christo, who is Bulgarian by birth, speaks with an intensity that overcomes his accent and his still shaky command of English, while Jeanne-Claude's French-tinted fluency gets all the laughs. At a lecture at the Pratt Institute in 1980, when someone asked why they refused to consider situating "The Gates" in an alternate location, such as Brooklyn's Prospect Park, she answered, "Sir, did you marry the woman you loved, or an alternate woman?" At the Bloomberg press conference last January, when a reporter pressed her to give a cost figure for "The Gates," she told him, "Go and ask your mother if she could give an estimate for the cost of raising you." She and Christo complement one another in unexpected ways. When she decided, some years ago, to become a redhead, he went to the hairdresser with her and picked out the color. She says, "I tell everybody I am a natural redhead, but I dye my roots black and white." Nobody enjoys her humor more than Christo. When she talks to an audience, you can see him smiling avidly, his lips forming the words as she speaks them.

The sun is getting low over Central Park West. The Christos had wanted to show me the paths by the Metropolitan Museum, which will be girdled by a hundred and ninety-three gates, but we have run out of time. Before the car drops me off, though, I ask about their upcoming exhibition at the Met, which is scheduled to open on April 6, 2004. It's to be called "Christo and Jeanne-Claude: The Gates, Central Park, New York," and it will have drawings, collages, photographs, maps, and technical diagrams relating to the project, and components of one of the gates. There have been two hundred and forty-eight museum exhibitions of their work around the world, but only one, until now, in New York—a small show at the Museum of Modern Art, in 1968. The problem has always been that Christo and Jeanne-Claude insist on being their own curators. The Whitney tried to do a Christo drawings show in 1979, but Christo and Jeanne-Claude wanted to be in charge of the catalogue, and they wanted to bring in a guest curator to design and install the exhibition, as well as an architect to redesign the exhibition space (they proposed Gaetana Aulenti, who later turned the Gare d'Orsay, in Paris, into a museum), and when the museum refused several of these requests Jeanne-Claude rose from the table, wrapped herself in her voluminous Issey Miyake cape, and said, "Thank you, gentlemen, the exhibition is cancelled." I had asked the Metropolitan's director, Philippe de Montebello, how the Met was dealing with this question. He said that Christo and Jeanne-Claude's "level of involvement" in the show "has probably been greater than it would be with a lot of other artists," but "it is still our exhibition," and that Anne L. Strauss, the Metropolitan curator assigned to the exhibition, "has been making the ultimate choice of the works."



"No," Jeanne-Claude tells me firmly. "The choice of works is entirely ours, and every work belongs to us."

"Also the photographs," Christo says. "And I design the catalogue cover."

"And Anne Strauss, together with you, will design the installation."

"I design the installation!" (Christo, indignant).

MONDAY MORNING

Today we're having the windows washed . . .
I think of how such a journal entry
Might have proceeded if written by an
Actual novelist, or superb
Epistolarian (known for her acid
Eye, gentle heart, and platinum tongue),
Or essayist of an older sort,
All of whom had memorious eyes
And capacious memories for details:
Their "powers of observation" make
Me feel blind to the moment and
Mindless of just what was said or worn.
The true novelist's mandarin prose,
Of whatever mode, makes up its own
Recordings of what it made take place
On disks themselves made up of years
Of recycled detailed remembrances
That I don't have to draw or write on.
But I'll give the window washers a try.
Let's see: I'll at least remember that
There were three of them, and one came first
To case the joint, as it were, and that
All of them were of medium height,
Slender and dark, and that they did
Indeed clean all the windows, inside and
Out, hanging on safety straps
Above the distant ground. That's it.

But my own windows that look out
On the immediate world—the ones
Through which they used to say the soul

Peers out and love comes in—get washed
Only by tears, and what I know
Of what's out there comes in through one
Of the cleaner spots. Their size and
Their placement both are meaningless,
And make me wonder about what
I get to see, whether of windows—
And what goes on when they get cleaned
And who said what to whom and who
Did which and with what—or of mirrored
Eyes or imagined minds. So that
In the matter of the men who came
To clean the windows, what could I say?
"If memory serves . . ." but it will not:
And, like language itself when at
Its best or even craziest,
Ich dien it will not say—like each
Dutiful Prince of Wales for seven
Centuries—but rather *non
Serviam*, the Adversary's
No way! At the instant of starting up
The engines of noticing, memory—
As full of random holes as any
Uncleaned window is of spots
Of blur and dimming—begins at once
To interfere, and so one's eyes
Brim with forgetting long before
The presence of a pastness, ears
Can't quite recall what they are hearing.
That's all there is to say about
The windows being washed today.

—*John Hollander*

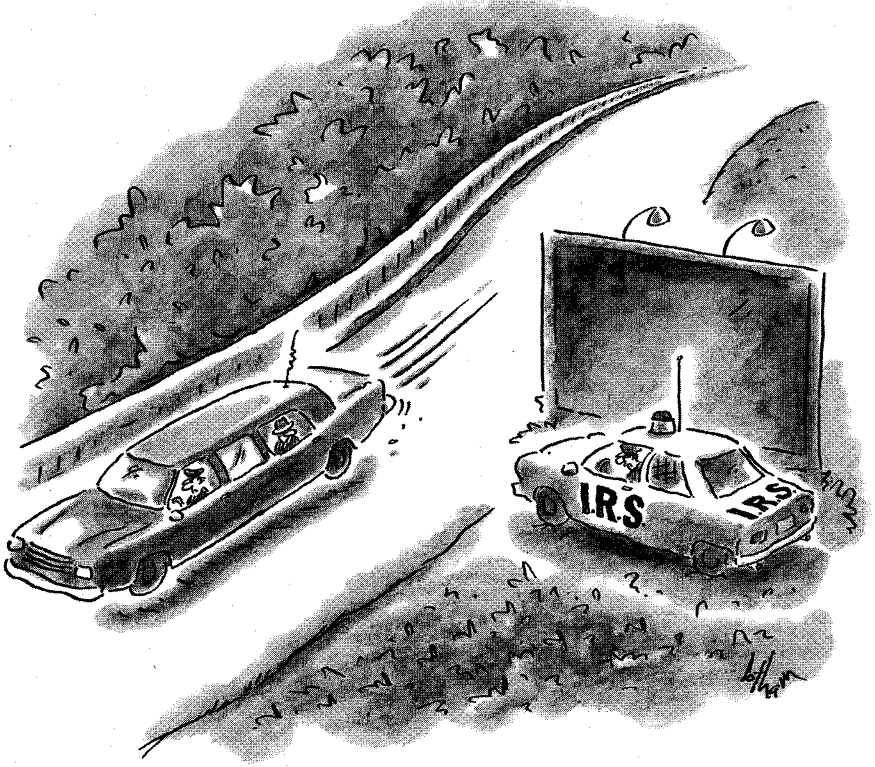
"No, Christo, no. It is the opposite. nne Strauss, *together with you.*"

"O.K., *chérie*," Christo says, getting e point.

first met the Christos forty years ago, at the 1964 Biennale in Venice. They had ready left Paris by then, and had spent e previous four months living at the helsea Hotel, in New York. That fall, ey rented the top two floors of a dilapiated five-story loft building in SoHo, d laid siege to the art world. They inted artists, critics, collectors, museum rators, art dealers, and various other inders to dinner parties at their loft. As couple, they evoked mixed reactions. ost people found Jeanne-Claude vivaous and charming, but they were often t off by her relentless efforts to proote Christo's art. If you said you couldn't me to dinner, she would propose several alternative dates, and then ask, well, when *could* you come? Christo, who radiated friendliness and energy, spoke virtually no English. Born and reared in Bulgaria, he had studied art at the Fine Arts Academy in Sofia, where the Communist regime expunged any references to modernism. He escaped to the West in 1957, made his way to Vienna and then to Paris, and used his classical training to support himself by painting portraits of society people in Paris, including Précilda de Guillebon, the wife of a Gaullist general and war hero, and Jeanne-Claude, her daughter by a previous marriage. He signed the portraits with his family name, Javacheff, but for everything else he used his first name, the international-sounding Christo. Having caught up with modernism in a hurry, Christo was forging a reputation in avant-garde circles for wrapping all sorts of objects in canvas or clear plastic—bottles, tin cans, chairs, telephones, shopping carts, motorcycles, a car, trees, nude women. His work appealed to the *nouveaux réalistes*, the liveliest artist group in Paris, but he was not invited to sign their joint manifesto or, with two exceptions, to exhibit with them; the *nouveaux réalistes* were impressed, nevertheless, when Christo, Jeanne-Claude, and several paid helpers built an "Iron Curtain" of two hundred and forty stacked oil barrels, which totally (and illegally) blocked the Rue Visconti, one of Paris's narrowest streets, for a few hours in June, 1962. Christo and Jeanne-Claude were living together but not yet married (her parents vehemently opposed a marriage to an artist with doubtful prospects), and they had a two-and-a-half-year-old son named Cyril. Feeling somewhat ostracized, and aware that the center of contemporary art was shifting to New York, they came in 1964 to see for themselves; and, Jeanne-Claude said, "we didn't just like the city—we loved it." They went to all the gallery openings, met the artists, and revelled in the anarchic energy of a period when every day seemed to bring some fresh development. "Probably the most important thing is I see so many foreigners," Christo recalls. "In Paris, most people are French-speaking, but here they're all speaking broken English."

"Some even worse than Christo," Jeanne-Claude says. It took him several years to become reasonably fluent in English. Jeanne-Claude, who had learned it in school, acted as his interpreter and got criticized for answering when someone asked him a question.

Ideas for New York projects took shape in his fifth-floor studio. They wanted to wrap two downtown buildings, 20 Exchange Place and 2 Broadway, in homage to the New York skyline that had thrilled them when they first saw it from the deck of the France. He made drawings of this, and drawings of the Allied Chemical Tower, on Times Square, snugly packaged in canvaslike fabric and rope. Wrapping had become his signature technique, his way of transforming common objects into strange and evocative presences. Christo had studied the way the Old Masters used drapery to simultaneously conceal and reveal the human form. One reason his drawings were so striking was their application of classical, beautifully rendered line and shading to wildly surreal images. The owners of the buildings



turned them down, of course. Yet Christo was able to sell a few of his more modest wrappings, and Sidney Janis put two of his packages in an important 1962 show called "New Realists." Leo Castelli, whose gallery represented the leading Pop and minimal artists, showed two of Christo's "Storefronts" (realistic mockups of empty store windows), one in 1964 and another in 1966, but Castelli did not ask him to join the gallery. His work seemed to have little or no relation to either Pop art or minimalism, the two dominant tendencies of the moment. Christo and Jeanne-Claude looked at everything, and even took part in some of the performance-art pieces called "happenings," but they found it all "too complicated," as Christo phrased it to me, "too literary or too theatrical. The things we wanted to do were very simple, one thing."

Their obsession was to wrap a whole building. A museum seemed the obvious choice. He made drawings for a wrapped Whitney Museum and a wrapped Museum of Modern Art; MOMA's head curator of painting and sculpture, William Rubin, who put two Christo wrappings in his "Dada, Surrealism, and Their Heritage" show, in 1968, was interested in the concept, but both museums declined. Within months of MOMA's refusal, though, Harald Szeemann, the innovative director of the Kunsthalle in Bern, Switzerland, arranged for Christo and Jeanne-Claude to wrap his museum in the summer of 1968. (Jeanne-Claude never saw this, because she was overseeing a simultaneous project in Spoleto, wrapping a medieval tower and a baroque fountain, which Christo didn't see.) That same summer, Christo and Jeanne-Claude succeeded, after several spectacular failures, in raising a two-hundred-and-eighty-foot-tall, sausage-shaped "air package" for the international Documenta exhibition in Kassel, Germany. By far their most ambitious undertaking to date, the air package cost fifty-six thousand dollars, most of which Jeanne-Claude raised by persuading a few collectors to take her I.O.U.s for future Christo drawings and collages.

An Australian businessman named John Kaldor was so impressed by the Documenta air package that he came to see Christo and Jeanne-Claude in New York and bought one of Christo's packages. A few months later, Kaldor persuaded his company to invite the Christos to Australia. Christo and Jeanne-Claude, who had been thinking about wrapping a section of the Pacific coastline, proposed doing it in Australia instead, an
Kaldor miraculously got a hospital to le
him wrap a mile-and-a-half-long sectio
of its waterfront property in Little Ba
nine miles from central Sydney. Wit
Kaldor's help, Christo and Jeanne-Claud
mobilized more than a hundred students
teachers, local artists, and rock climbers
and covered a million square feet of rock
cliffs and shoreline in a loosely wove
mesh fabric (the kind used for erosio
control), tying it down with thirty-fiv
miles of rope. Their "Wrapped Coast
cost them a hundred and twenty thousand dollars, remained in place for te
weeks, provided spectacular photographs
and launched the Christos on their caree
as creators of extravagant, useless, an
unexpectedly gorgeous interventions i
the natural order.

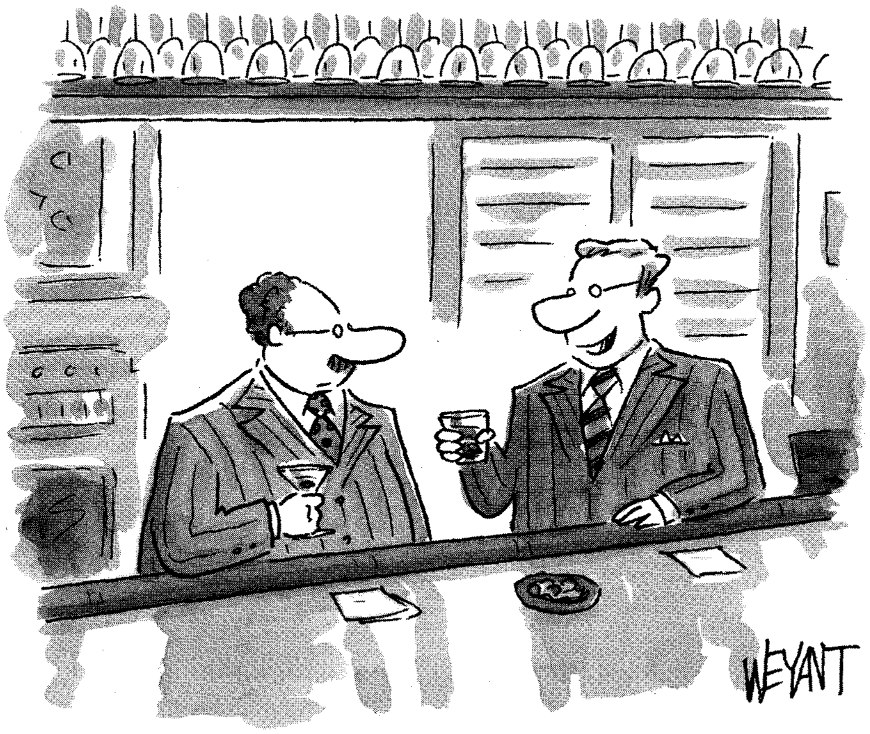
Each new project was more ambitious than the last, and most of them incurred heavy opposition, although n
always from the expected sources. Th
people of Rifle Gap, Colorado, love
"Valley Curtain" (1970-72), a huge stretc
of brilliant-orange nylon designed t
bridge the narrow gap between tw
mountains just north of town. The ranchers of Northern California came to fe
the same way about "Running Fenc
(1972-76), a shimmering eighteen-foo
high white nylon apparition that ros
from the sea in Bodega Bay and meandered sinuously through Marin Count
and Sonoma County on a twenty-fou
and-a-half-mile journey through th
landscape. Most of the ranchers whos
land it crossed became Christo enthus
asts, but a consortium of local artist
convinced that the "Fence" was not a
and that the whole thing was just an eg
trip or some kind of commercial scam,
both, forced the Christos to pay hundre
of thousands of dollars in legal fees to d
fend their project. More than a milli
people came to see the "Fence" during i
two-week stay, and a great many of the
were enchanted by its ever-changing r
sponsiveness to the wind, the light, a
the rolling brown hills and valleys
Northern California. Like all the Chri
tos' projects before and since, it was f
more beautiful than anyone had anti
ipated, Christo and Jeanne-Claude i
cluded. "These projects are richer th
my imagination," he said once. "They
beyond anything I had foreseen."

Their spirits buoyed by the worl

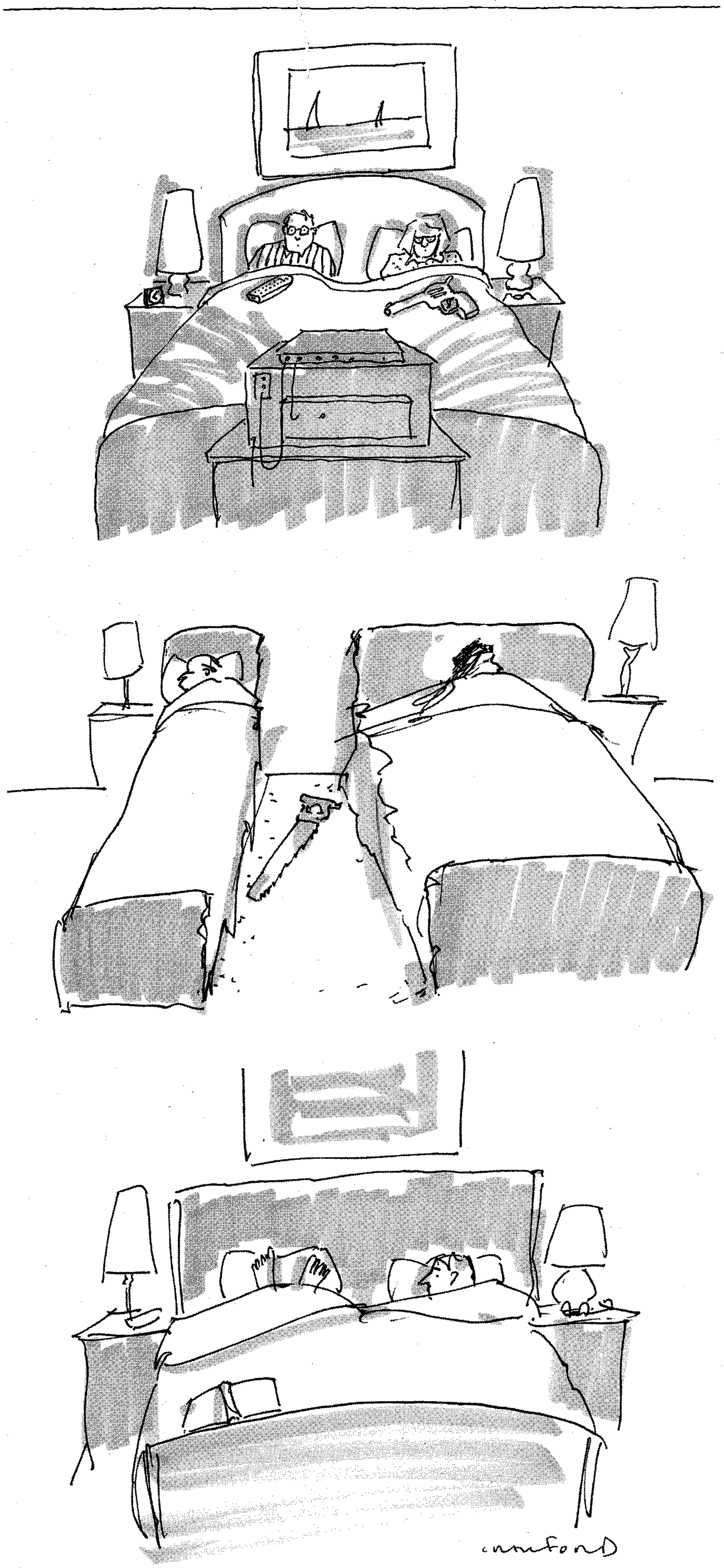
ide, overwhelmingly favorable press overage of "Running Fence" (whose 3.2-million cost took them a year to ay off), they returned to New York in ie fall of 1976 determined to do a proj- ct in their adopted city. They no longer iought of wrapping a building. (Al- iough they are often described as art- sts who wrap things, many of their major rojects have not involved wrapping.) As New Yorkers," Christo said, "we real- zed that this is the most walking city i the world. People are walking every- here. For a few seconds—maybe a eek—we thought of creating a work sing the sidewalks, but we knew we ould never get permission." It wasn't ntil 1979, three years later, that they it on the notion of using Central Park. anne-Claude had spent many hours in ie Park with their son, Cyril, when he as growing up. (Now forty-three, Cyril married, lives in Santa Fe, and writes oetry.) In 1979, she began to read up on , learning what Frederick Law Olmsted id Calvert Vaux had in mind when they esigned and laid out the Park's eight indred and forty acres. In their original Greensward" proposal of 1858, Olm- ed had written that the Park, more than mply a place of amusement, was in- nded to be a work of art. As he later rote, the "main object and justification simply to produce a certain influence the minds of people." This influence, e went on to say, "is a poetic one and it to be produced by means of scenes, rough observation of which the mind ay be more or less lifted out of moods, id habits into which it is, under ordinary nditions of life in the city, likely to ll." A completely man-made landscape, rmed by thousands of workers mov- g more than four million cubic yards stone, earth, and topsoil, Central Park as a late flowering of design princi- es derived from eighteenth-century nglish landscape architecture, whose nphasis on the "picturesque" reflected venteenth-century paintings by Nico- s Poussin and Claude Lorrain. Univer- lly beloved, perennially endangered neglect, overuse, and commercial in- ests, it has long been a sacred place, d one in which nearly every sentient ew Yorker takes a proprietary interest.

The Park has fifty-eight miles of pe- strian paths. Early in 1979, Christo ade some initial drawings of what he called "The Thousand Gates (Project)" for Central Park. The gates in these drawings were twelve feet high, and made (like "Running Fence") of round steel poles supporting saffron-colored fabric panels. The title came from Olmsted and Vaux, who had put a stone wall around their "Greensward," and designated the entrances "gates." "There is no gate, but they called it a gate," Jeanne-Claude explained, "and they gave names to these gates—Merchants' Gate, Scholars' Gate, Engineers' Gate, and so forth." By having their gates follow the walking paths, which Olmsted and Vaux had laid out with flowing, serpentine contours, Christo and Jeanne-Claude envisaged them as being in direct and pleasing contrast to the geometric grid of streets and blocks outside the Park. "The project is ceremonial, it is festive, it is very invitational, and in the same way very private," Christo told me. "You are invited into something extremely simple, a glorious promenade."

Gordon J. Davis, New York City's Commissioner of Parks and Recreation during the administration of Mayor Edward Koch, was fairly new to the job when he met the Christos, in 1980. Appointed two years earlier, he had inherited "an empire that looked," as he put it, "like Napoleon's army retreating from Moscow." After a decade of cascading budget cuts (the result of the city's mounting financial crisis) and official indifference, Central Park was in worse shape than it had been at any time since the early nineteen-thirties. Broken lamps and benches, lawns whose soil was so compacted that the grass had given up, unpruned trees, dried-up ponds—Olmsted and Vaux's masterpiece was dying, and Davis, a lawyer with an aggressive, somewhat flamboyant manner, had become passionate about saving it. He was already clamping down on the free rock concerts and other public events that had turned the Sheep Meadow into a dust bowl. He appointed Elizabeth Barlow, a private citizen who had written an excellent book on Olmsted, and who was then directing a modestly funded volunteer "task force" of park helpers, to the new post of Central Park Administrator; Davis and Barlow soon joined forces to set up the Central Park Conservancy, a novel, public-private partnership whose main function would be to raise serious money from the private sector to restore the Park. "I was just getting a handle on all this," Davis told me, "when I got a call from Ted Kheel"—Theodore Kheel, the



"When I was a child, I drank like a child, but when I became a man I put away childish drinks."



labor arbitrator—“who wanted to com
in and talk to me about the Christos.
saw him, and shortly afterward the Chri
tos came in to see me, along with the
cameramen”—the documentary filmma
ers Albert and David Maysles. (Chris
and Jeanne-Claude have all their impo
tant meetings filmed.) “By then I ha
begun to read up. Ted Kheel is a form
dable messenger.”

Davis knew something about conten
porary art, and he was aware of Chri
to’s work. “Personally, I was enchante
by Christo and Jeanne-Claude, and l
the idea of saffron-colored banners wa
ing in the wind,” he said. “But the la
thing we needed then was having to de
with this. They couldn’t have come at
worse time.” As world-famous artis
Christo and Jeanne-Claude were able
marshal a lot of influential support f
their cause. Manhattan Borough Pre
ident Andrew J. Stein endorsed “T
Gates,” and so did Agnes Gund, a pron
inent trustee of the Museum of Mode
Art, and Leo Steinberg, the art historia
The *Times* came out with an editorial o
posing it, however (“Central Park nee
loving hands of restoration, not exploit
tion”), and a number of people on the n
scent Central Park Conservancy boa
felt that “The Gates” would despoil t
Park, that it wasn’t art, that it would be
obscene waste of park funds (as usu
very few people believed the Christ
were really going to pay for everythin
and that Central Park itself was a work
art and didn’t need Christo’s additio
Davis treated the issue as a unique opp
tunity. He holed up in his office and p
his evolving thoughts about the Park,
administration, its future redevelopme
and what he considered the appropri
use of its resources into a hundred-an
seven-page “Report and Determinati
in the Matter of Christo: The Gates.”

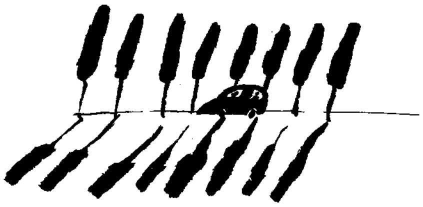
This extraordinary document to
the Christos and their proposal seriou
It noted that they had already prov
their ability to finance and carry out v
large projects in complex settings, wit
out damage to the environment, and t
“The Gates” would undoubtedly b
work of art, one that might, during
two-week existence, “comment on t
Park itself in the same manner as Chr
to’s Running Fence commented so my
teriously and splendidly on the Calif
nia hills and Western sky.” The Pa

condition, however, and the probable impact that huge numbers of "Gates" viewers would have on it, and the dangers of setting a precedent for future park use by others, had led Davis to conclude that permission must be denied. As he phrased it in his report, "The project is, after all, in the wrong place, at the wrong time, and in the wrong scale." The *Times* weighed in with an editorial applauding Davis's "sound decision," and that, for the next twenty-two years, was that.

The Christos went on to achieve their improbable triumphs. In 1991, they pulled off a two-continent project called "The Umbrellas, Japan-U.S.A.," simultaneously installing 1,760 giant yellow umbrellas in Southern California and 1,340 blue ones in rural Japan. "The Umbrellas" cost twenty-six million dollars, more than "Surrounded Islands" and "The Pont Neuf Wrapped" combined, and the project was marked, tragically, by two deaths: in California, an umbrella was torn loose from its moorings by a violent wind, causing a woman to fall and hit her head against a rock; in Japan, a project worker was electrocuted by the current from a high-tension wire. Christo and Jeanne-Claude closed the project down early and dedicated the subsequent book and film on the project to the memory of the deceased. These have been the only serious accidents on any of their projects, each of which has involved immensely difficult engineering problems, heavy-duty equipment, and legions of paid workers—more than two thousand on "The Umbrellas" alone.

The Christos also completed a number of smaller projects here and there, and, as always, they had others "in progress," such as the "Mastaba," which they proposed, in 1977, to build in the United Arab Emirates state of Abu Dhabi: a vast, trapezoidal structure of 390,500 stacked oil barrels, it would be larger than the Great Pyramid of Cheops, and even the Christos concede that current conditions in the Middle East do not favor its realization. Their projects are all conceived, as Christo says, at the boundary between the possible and the impossible. If the Berlin Wall had not fallen, they would probably still be trying to get permission to wrap the Reichstag. They made more than fifty trips to Germany between 1976 and 1995, met privately with six successive presidents of the Bundestag and with more than three hundred Bundestag members, and Christo sat tensely in the gallery while a special parliamentary session debated the project, in February, 1994, and then voted on it. The vote favored the project, 292 to 223, with nine abstentions. More than five million people came to see the "Wrapped Reichstag" in 1995. They saw the grim and oppressive architectural pile transformed by more than a million square feet of sparkling silver-colored polypropylene into a sensuous, dreamlike fantasy, set down in a sea of picnickers, bongo drummers, strollers, and holiday-spirited tourists from all over Europe. The German-born Wolfgang Volz, one of the two project directors of the "Wrapped Reichstag" (he has been the exclusive photographer for all Christo projects since "Valley Curtain"), told me that "one of the few people who still don't think it was a good thing is Helmut Kohl"—the former Chancellor—"who was against it from the beginning and refused to go and see it."

During these years, visitors to the second floor of the Christos' SoHo building, which they now own, might see drawings or collages of "The Gates" from time to time, on the back wall. The second floor is where the Christos receive visitors—curators and dealers from around the world, key collaborators on various projects, social facilitators, politicians, and (most important) collectors who have bought and/or might buy Christo's drawings and collages. Usually, the long wall that faces you when you enter this bare, uningratiating room is hung with works relating to the current project, and these days that means "The Gates." The works come in varying sizes, and the prices range accordingly: from twenty-five thousand dollars for an eight-and-a-half-by-eleven-inch collage to four hundred and eighty thousand dollars for the largest drawings, which are eight feet wide (some are in two parts) and look like lushly detailed architectural renderings. The international art market can apparently absorb an infinite number of Christos. From 1987 to the end of 2003, Jeanne-Claude's computer shows, they had sold just over sixty-six million dollars' worth of his work. (This includes very expensive, pre-1964 packages and other objects, many of which they have in storage; they try to buy others back at auction whenever they can.) A large proportion of their sales are to dealers, to whom they offer various discounts, and the majority of the buyers are European. But new buyers emerge every year. Many corporations find Christo's work ideal—vanguard art that is representational, in a bravura, virtuoso style. The Christos, whose earnings all go to pay for their projects, are themselves corporate entrepreneurs. Scott Hodes, their lawyer, incorporated them years ago, partly to shield their projects from financial liability, and as far back as 1983 the *Wall Street Journal* calculated that their CVJ Corporation (the letters stand for Christo Vladimirov Javacheff) was the country's third-ranking corporate art patron, behind Exxon and Philip Morris: a patron with only one client.

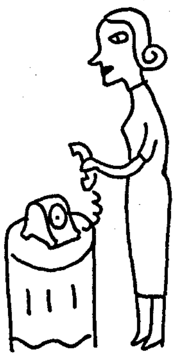


Not long after Christo and Jeanne-Claude got back from wrapping the Reichstag, Michael Bloomberg came to visit them. A billionaire with his own hugely successful media business, Bloomberg was also on the board of the Central Park Conservancy, which had raised more than a hundred and fifty million dollars between 1980 and 1995, and carried out, in partnership with the Department of Parks and Recreation, an almost complete reclamation and restoration of the Park. The conservancy had become a powerful and influential New York institution, and in recent years Christo and Jeanne-Claude had often tried to approach its board members, or to have friends do so, without much success. (The board was still strongly influenced by Henry Stern, whose view, as he expressed it to me, was that "Christo was trying to appropriate the glory and history and reputation of Central Park to enhance his own standing in the art world.") Bloomberg seemed interested, though, and said he would bring up "The Gates" at the conservancy's next meeting. Not long after this, at a dinner party in New York, Christo and Jeanne-Claude met Richard Gilder, a wealthy investment banker who had contributed seventeen million dollars to the conservancy, and whose implacable opposition to "The

Gates" carried much weight with fellow board members. Gilder told them that their "friend" Michael Bloomberg had been talking to him, and he said that, as Christo heard it, "my door is now ajar." Christo and Jeanne-Claude immediately made plans to invite Gilder to dinner. (These days, they take their dinner guests to the restaurant of the French Culinary Institute, a few blocks from their loft.) They asked Inmaculada von Habsburg-Lothringen, a mutual friend, to help them arrange it, but she informed them soon afterward that Gilder wouldn't come, because he didn't want to be "seduced." The conservancy's door stayed closed. The Christos continued to focus on "Over the River," their most active current work in progress, which involves stretching 6.7 miles of fabric panels over forty miles of the Arkansas River in Colorado.

Bloomberg's election as mayor of New York, in 2001, came as a surprise to many people. "I told Christo, 'We are not going to bother him until June,'" Jeanne-Claude recalls. "But we get invited to his inauguration, and as he is kissing me he says, 'You know, when I was a candidate, everybody said that if I won we will see "The Gates" in Central Park.' And then, in March of 2002, we get a telephone call from deputy mayor Patricia Harris, asking if she can come to see us." Bloomberg had told Harris to look into the "Gates" project, and "see if you think this can happen." The Christos were ready for her. For several weeks, they had been concentrating full time on "The Gates," rethinking the project. Vince Davenport, their chief engineer and director of construction on "The Umbrellas" and other projects and now on "The Gates," had solved the problem of making the gateposts vertical. His solution was to use five-inch-square hard-vinyl posts instead of steel poles, and to anchor each one with a weighted steel base that had a levelling plate built into it. This would make it unnecessary to dig any holes in the Park—an important factor, as it turned out, in convincing the Central Park authorities to give them a permit. The Christos had also decided to do the project in February instead of October, because there would be no leaves on the trees then.

Harris came several times to see Christo and Jeanne-Claude. She brought Adrian Benepe, Henry Stern's successor as Parks Commissioner, and Regina Peruggi, the president of the conservancy, and several others, most of whom proved susceptible to the Christos' well-honed powers of seduction. They liked the weighted-base idea. They also liked the change of date, because in February there were fewer people using the Park. Christo and Jeanne-Claude, Vince and Jonita Davenport, Wolfgang and Sylvia Volz, and a few assistants walked the length and breadth of the Park with Douglas Blonsky, the Central Park Administrator and chief operating officer of the Central Park Conservancy, taking measurements and deciding where the gates would go and how many there would be. The number of gates, which had increased over the years from the original thousand to upward of eleven thousand, based on the total mileage of all the Park's footpaths, now dropped back to approximately seventy-five hundred. The Park people were reassured by Davenport's authoritative grasp of the technical problems, and by the Christos' willingness to agree to a long list of conditions and requirements. Meanwhile, the Christos were attending meetings and winning the support of the five community boards in the areas surrounding the Park. In December, 2002, the board of the Central Park Conservancy approved a policy statement saying that "The Gates" would not harm the Park. "I was thoroughly outvoted," Richard Gilder told me. "I still believe the polls showing that eighty-five or ninety per cent of Park users go there for quiet contemplation—what Olmsted wanted when he created the place—and I feel that they're my constituency. I'm against everything like this. To me, it's sacred grass, so I couldn't be for it. But I've been wrong many times, and I could well be wrong again."



When it came to negotiating a contract between the Christos and the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation, there were many problems to be solved. The Park wanted them to pay a fee of three million dollars—over and above their costs of building, installing, insuring, maintaining, and removing the project. Christo, Jeanne-Claude, and their lawyers, including Theodore Kheel, had hoped that some or all of this fee could be covered by a licensing agreement, through which the Park would profit from the sale of posters and other items; Adrian Benepe wanted the three million in cash, up front, before a single "Gates" worker entered the Park. The Christos referred to the fee as "extortion," in a *Village Voice* interview—after which they promptly apologized to Benepe, Blonsky, Patricia Harris, and Mayor Bloomberg. They had already agreed to pay the fee, at any rate, and the contract was signed in January, 2003. Mayor Bloomberg's announcement came a few days later. Stressing that "The Gates" wouldn't cost the city a penny and was expected to attract half a million out-of-town tourists and generate between seventy-two and a hundred and thirty-six million dollars in economic activity, the Mayor praised Christo and Jeanne-Claude as "true New Yorkers," who were reasserting "the daring and imaginative spirit which really differentiates New York from any other city in the world." The Mayor had already indicated his private opinion by buying two of Christo's "Gates" drawings, one large and one medium-sized, for his personal art collection. Among the dignitaries on hand for the public announcement was Gordon Davis, the former Parks Commissioner. With the Park so gloriously restored, he said, he had changed his mind about "The Gates," and his "wonderful adversaries of twenty years ago are now my friends."

One day recently, I visited Jeanne-Claude in her cluttered fourth-floor office (their bedroom and living room are on the same floor), from which she directs the vast buildup to "The Gates." Most of the materials had been fabricated by this time, by manufacturers in the United States and Germany, and delivered to a plant in Queens, where Vince Davenport and his crew will assemble the elements and store them for transport to the Park, early next January. (Vince's wife, Jonita, the "Gates" project director, has her office there.) With nearly a year to go, Jeanne-Claude's expenses had hit two hundred thousand dollars a week. "We have never sold so well," she told me, "more than seven million dollars' worth of

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Look out, world, 'cause HERE I COME!

Christo's work in 2003 alone, but it's a drop in the bucket. I have only two million in the bank at present." She was hoping that she wouldn't have to use the line of credit they'd negotiated, offering as collateral their several warehouses full of stored Christos. (Last October, she paid off the final installment on a line of credit for the Reichstag project.) Christo and Jeanne-Claude have taken out a two-year, twenty-million-dollar insurance policy on Christo's life, so that if he should die, there will be enough money to finish the project.

Not all her current activities involve high finance. A week or so earlier, Jeanne-Claude had resolved a knotty problem with the Metropolitan Museum of Art, which wanted to market a "Gates" tote bag and a "Gates" silk scarf in connection with the exhibition this spring. Christo and Jeanne-Claude had agreed, but only if those items carried disclaimers stating that the artists received no money from the sales. When the Met presented its idea for their approval, the disclaimer was to be included inside the bag, printed on a sheet of paper. "I said, 'No way,' " Jeanne-Claude told me. "That paper disappears, and people see the bag and think, Oh, that's how they make their money." After much discussion, the Met's marketing people finally agreed to a cloth disclaimer, sewn into each product. The Christos have also authorized the sale of signed posters and other "Gates" artifacts for the sole benefit of Theodore Kheel's Nurture New York's Nature alliance, which supports environmental efforts and the arts in the metropolitan area.

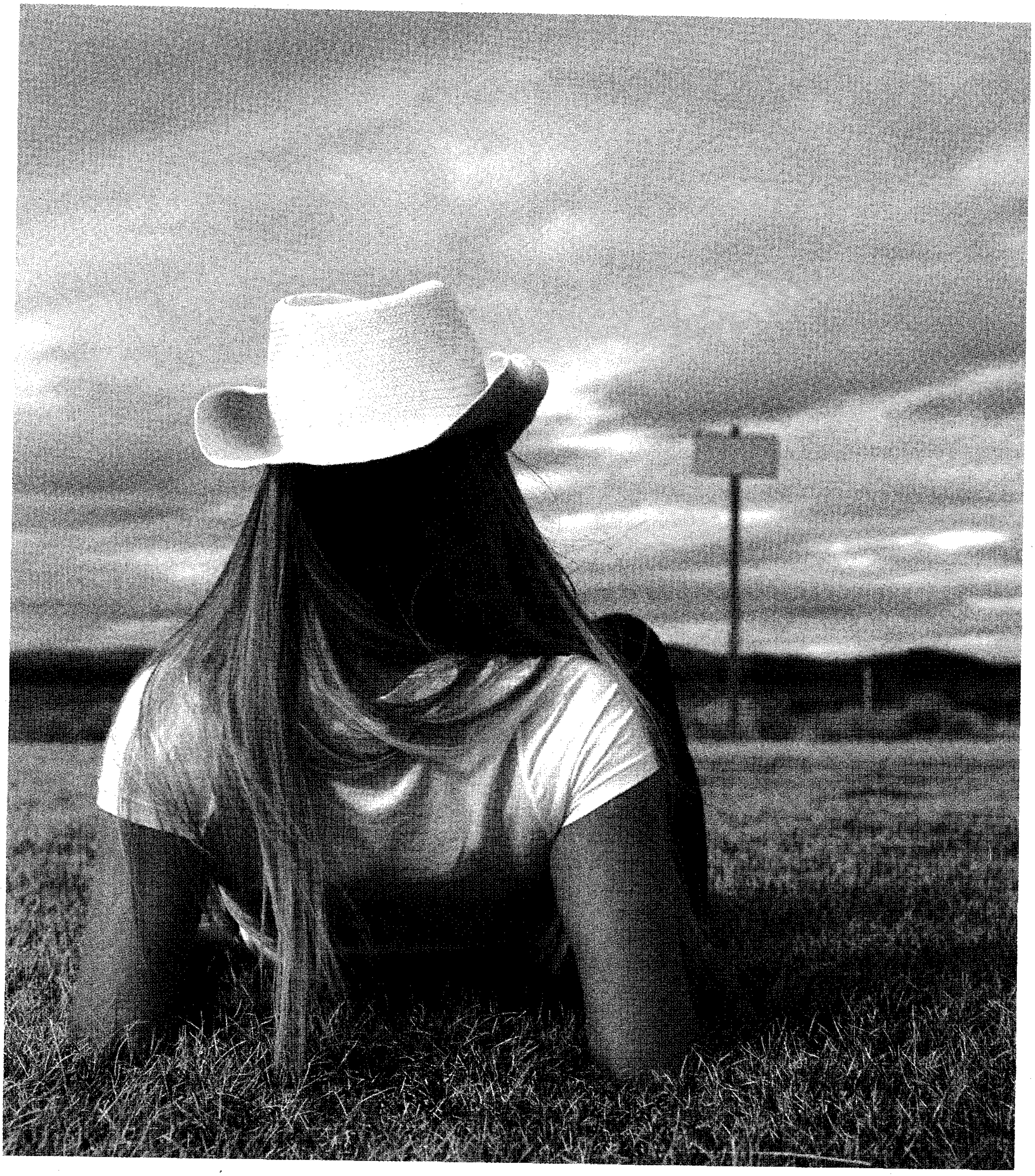
Christo's studio is one flight up, on the top floor. It looks pretty much the way it looked in the mid-sixties, when I first saw it. The room is long and narrow, with overhead fluorescent lighting and dingy, scarred walls. Most successful artists pour money into new studios and living spaces, but not Christo and Jeanne-Claude. Collectors gasp at having to climb the steep, dark, rickety flight of stairs to the second floor. When the Christos spend money on themselves, it is for things like chauffeured car services and Shiatsu massages; their masseur, Alex Zide, has been coming to them three times a week for twenty-five years. They have taken no vacations in forty years. Unless he is travelling, Christo puts in fifteen to seventeen hours a day, every day, in the studio. He has never had an assistant. He does his own framing, in Plexiglas frames he buys from a wholesaler. He works standing up, at a variety of well-worn tables; his largest drawings won't fit on any table, so he lays them down on the floor, straps on gardener's kneepads, and works on his hands and knees. He chews raw garlic cloves in lieu of lunch, and listens to 1010 WINS all-news radio while he works, on a minuscule, dust-covered receiver that must date from the Precambrian era. (Jeanne-Claude listens only to Mozart, played very softly on the stereo.) Christo, who will talk volubly about the technical aspects of his projects, resists discussing the social, political, or aesthetic ideas that go into them. Jeanne-Claude does that for him sometimes, when she speaks about the ephemeral quality of all their projects—the fact that they exist briefly and then disappear—as "an aesthetic decision," a way of endowing their work with "those feelings of love and tenderness for things that do not last, like childhood, like our own lives."

Years ago, soon after they moved to New York, Christo said he wanted to "use American social structure and make it work" for him, and in my view he has done that more ingeniously and more generously than any other living artist. For several generations now, artists have talked and dreamed of getting "outside art," of going beyond the semi-closed system of galleries and museums to connect with a wider audience. Some of them have tried to do so through film, video, or the Internet. The "earth artists" who emerged in the late nineteen-sixties sought to reshape the landscape in remote areas—so remote, in most cases, that their efforts have been inaccessible to all but the most dedicated viewers. Christo and Jeanne-Claude, on the other hand, have built the social structure right into their art, so that anyone who has anything to do with "The Gates"—me, Gordon Davis, the *Times*, Patricia Harris, Mayor Bloomberg, Vince and Jonita Davenport, Philippe de Montebello, Richard Gilder, Theodore Kheel, the workers who made the gateposts and sewed the cloth, the sixty-odd men and women who will install the hardware in the Park next January, the five hundred and fifty paid nonskilled workers who will raise the gates and unfurl the saffron banners, and the half million spectators who are expected to view "The Gates" during its sixteen-day run in February—becomes part of an artistic event that required that person for its completion, and which will lodge in the mind for years to come. "We do it for ourselves, first of all, to see what it will look like," Christo has said. Then, as part of their life-into-art process, they give it away. ♦

FICTION

FATHER DAUGHTER

BY JIM HARRISON



"I hope you share my alarm over the reports of sexual misconduct at the Air Force Academy."

"Oh, God, Dad, chill. We don't date those dweebs."

Norton and Laura were lunching in a faux-French bistro in Colorado Springs, not far from the upscale private college where she was now a junior. His massive buffalo cheeseburger and her chicken salad had just been brought to the table by a server named Matthew, who had a silver thumbtack in his tongue and a ring in his nose. Norton had been tempted to ask his daughter the meaning behind these ornaments but was distracted by the thought that "chill" was the equivalent of his generation's "cool it." There were several Air Force cadets having Saturday lunch nearby with their glowing parents, but these particular young men, at least, didn't seem to be burbling with surly lust.

After three hungry bites, Norton let his mind drift in cheeseburger boredom while Laura tucked into her chicken. No one in his own, rural family—which had consisted of only his mother, his father, and himself—would ever have ordered chicken, an unclean fowl that you had to prepare with the utmost care, to avoid disease. Eating chicken in restaurants was part of Laura's youthful rebellion, which had begun when she was about ten. The first time she had done it in front of her grandmother, the old woman broke into tears.

"Are you coming up this summer?" He meant to Montana.

"Maybe yes, maybe no."

"It'd be nice to go trout fishing. We used to go trout fishing."

"Five times, to be exact." Laura liked to enumerate many things in her life, a habit that tended to irritate both her parents.

"I'm selling the place you hated. I bought a simple place over near Reed Point. My ambition is to fish fifty days this summer."

"Why not fifty-one or forty-nine? You're as bad as me. But I'm glad you're getting rid of that hellhole."

She was referring to his ranch outside Bozeman, in an area where wealthy weekenders had now replaced nearly all of the local ranchers. On the second day of her visit the previous summer, after a cocktail party at a neighbor's five-million-dollar cabin, Laura had unloaded at length. Her diatribe was so acute and curious he'd copied it down in his journal that night, while she talked on the phone with her latest boyfriend. The core of it was that the transplanted rich in the new West were desperate to attach themselves to any American tradition that still had a shred of vitality—in this case, cattle ranching. They didn't want to actually run cattle; they just wanted the feeling of ranching. For unclear reasons, they often built vast log homes—one had recently sold for twelve million dollars—which would have been unthinkable to real pioneers and ranchers, because of the difficulty of heating them. The houses were full of all sorts of non-indigenous flummery—Adirondack furniture, bibelots from the Southwest, native art from anywhere, since natives were largely interchangeable to these people. The men teetered in expensive cowboy boots and talked more loudly than they did back East; the women wore flowing, old-fashioned dresses to social occasions. Shiny S.U.V.s abounded. These people readily assumed the hard-bitten, right-wing opinions of the local ranchers, who, unlike them, had to live with long-term disappointment, owing to ever-declining cattle prices—even rich Americans are tightwads when it comes to meat. To Laura, it was all as ridiculous as the old photographs of Ronald Reagan chopping wood in a cowboy outfit.

At the bistro, her eyes swept the room, expressing her wish to be elsewhere. Norton suspected that his burger was inferior to the prison food he had become accustomed to. He sensed a specific lacuna of warmth, of any viable contact with his daughter, and this sensation caused a lump to rise in his throat. Then, miraculously, she smiled at him.

"As you used to say, let's blow this popsicle stand."

When they left, Matthew, their server, winked at Norton, as if Laura were a girlfriend rather than a daughter.

An hour later, they were beginning their second Martinis at a student bar. The first had made Norton mildly sentimental, but not Laura. He was trying to prod her into agreeing to visit over the summer, but she remained evasive. She hadn't decided whether to look for a job in New York or in Los Angeles, and he was irritated by the distance of both cities from Montana, unaware that Laura, at age twenty-one, spent very little time pondering his loneliness.

"Do you feel you paid your debt to society?" she asked with a silly smile. "My friends thought it was so dramatic that I had a dad in prison."

He knew that she was only avoiding the subject of summer plans, but he felt cornered. A middlingly successful venture capitalist, he had believed himself so accomplished at financial sleights of hand that not even the gods of commerce could have seen what he was doing, if they happened to be watching, which they weren't. Or so he'd thought. The I.R.S. had pinned him like a butterfly, and, after spending seven hundred thousand dollars on legal fees to lessen the charges, he'd bitten the bullet, paid his fines, and done his time. Less than a month had passed since his release from a nine-month stint for tax evasion at a federal prison in Milan, Michigan.

"The judge told me that I'd stolen from democracy. I ended up paying more than triple what I'd evaded. So that should make us even."

"I know a boy who's going to end up doing three to five years for possessing a pound of pot in Texas. I think you got off easy."

"You don't expect parity from God or the Supreme Court, do you?" he quipped, increasingly nervous as he caught her looking at her watch.

"I have to say that you seem different. I'm not sure how."

"I became ethical, and that caused a large drain on my energies. I learned in college that I was supposed to make money, but I never learned what to do with it. I just made money from other people like myself. It was like a fraternity poker game."

"How depressing!" Now she was yawning. "My professor said that your type used to be looked at with a less friendly eye. Now the media treat swindlers like cultural heroes. They lick the boots of the newly rich. That's what *he* said, anyway."

"How do I seem different?" He was mildly afraid of the answer.

BETH DIXSON/PHOTONICA

"You're less spiffy and less of a smart-aleck. We've been together for two whole hours and you haven't talked on your cell phone."

"I left it in the car on purpose." So far, so good. Like her mother, Laura could be terrifying when on a critical bent.

"You seem more defeated by life. Your hair is less trim than I remember it. Your eyes haven't flickered off to look at the college girls at the bar. You haven't said a thing about money. You haven't asked about Mom. She thinks it's funny that you're still paying her alimony when you could have quit three years ago, after I turned eighteen."

"It's dead money, anyway," he said lamely.

"Dead money?" She waved at a friend who was entering the tavern.

"Money I'd never get around to spending."

The friend, a pretty blond girl, stopped to say hello to Laura but moved on quickly before she could be introduced.

"A black man I made friends with in prison—a mob accountant from Detroit—said that he'd never been attracted to blondes, because they looked sort of boiled."

"Boiled? That's weird."

"I thought so, too." He was still hoping that there wouldn't be a punch line in her current assessment of his character. "Anything else?" he asked.

"Well, yes. I hope this doesn't offend you, but you remind me more of your dad. You remember how Grandpa always seemed on the verge of saying something important but then he never did? He was so, you know, northern Wisconsin Lutheran. When I was at camp up by Rhinelander, my friend Marcia showed her butt to this Swedish Lutheran stableboy, and you know what he said?"

"No." He was remembering the naughty but lovely Marcia, whom he had met several times.

"The boy said, 'Goodness gracious,' and went right on pitching hay."

The word "flummoxed" came into Norton's head. He desperately didn't want to remind Laura of his father, a kindly but maudlin man who had never recovered from having sold the back eighty acres of his family farm in an ill-advised attempt to enter the trucking business—he'd thought that U.S. Route 2 would become an interstate, but it never did. Another forty acres had been sold in order to send Norton to college, in Madison, and now his mother lived in the farmhouse on the remaining forty, seemingly much more cheerful than when her husband had been alive. Norton's preposterous success had astounded his father, without ever making him particularly happy. One time, when his parents had come to visit him in Chicago, Norton had reserved a suite for them at the Drake, and his father had traded it in for a regular room.

"Are you here? I didn't mean to stun you." Laura was waving a hand in front of his face. He was reminded of something that Frank, the black accountant, had said: that a nine-month sentence (which was what Frank was serving as well) was the gestation period it took for a middle-aged man to become an entirely new creature, one that he hadn't planned, or might not want, to be. Sure enough, as they used to say, it had happened.

"I will use any means possible to avoid becoming like my father," Norton said.

"It's no big deal. I didn't say you were exactly like him. Grandma is positively effervescent compared to him. You got her genes, too."

"I bought her a Camry last week and she said thanks, but she didn't need a radio in the car. It took me half an hour to explain to her that all new cars come with radios."

Laura thought this was very funny, but Norton was just trying to buy time, having discerned that a dark-skinned, nicely dressed young man at the bar was clearly Laura's boyfriend, waiting for the visit to be over.

"You could come up for a week in June, when school finishes."

"I've got tickets with my boyfriend to meet his parents in Santa Barbara. I haven't met them yet."

"Well, I haven't met him yet."

"You will in about ten minutes." He noted that, like her mother, Laura was unpleasantly shrewd in the way she framed time for her own purposes. It was now ten to three, and their visit had clearly been slotted in from noon to three. In the past, all of their meetings had been of this nature, except for summer vacations. He had been an insanely

"Looks like we've got a downer up here in human resources."

busy and driven man, and now that he no longer was it appeared that she went on scheduling him in the same way, out of habit.

“Where are you going from here?” she asked. His steady gaze had made her nervous.

“Back to Reed Point. I have a man coming over from Livingston tomorrow to help get rid of the rattlesnakes. I’ve shot seventeen, but I’m at the foot of the canyon and there must be a rattler den up in back.”

Just the other day, he had found two arrowheads and shot three snakes in one afternoon, which was what his longtime secretary would have called “multitasking.” She had wept bitterly when the judge sentenced him, and had now retreated from Chicago to Joplin, Missouri, to take care of her aging parents.

“One thing I wanted you to see,” he told Laura, “is that I’m living in a double-wide trailer. I had four big houses built in twelve years, and I didn’t like any of them. I didn’t lose a dime on those houses, but, oddly enough, I love this place. I can see the Yellowstone River from the living room.”

“You lost a lot on those houses, if you think of all the time you spent dicking around with architects, builders, and decorators. It was, like, all your spare time.” He drooped at this comment, and she changed direction. “Just think how Mom would screech if she knew that you were shooting rattlesnakes. Rattlesnakes are natural, not to mention organic.” Laura’s mother was a leading environmentalist fund-raiser and was shrill in her defense of the lowliest living creatures. She and Norton had divorced when Laura was ten, even though Norton hadn’t wanted to. The reasons had been of the banal we’re-growing-in-different-directions type, but Laura had always blamed it on her father’s financial greed.

“I could send a plane for you. Just give me a few days’ warning.” He knew that this might be a cardinal mistake, but it was two minutes to three.

“You’re living in a double-wide and you want to send a plane? Jesus, Dad. I’ll think about coming up, but it won’t be by charter. I mean, I doubt if I’ll make it. I just assumed that the I.R.S. had taken all your money.”

“Not really.” He was about to tell her that the I.R.S. had got only nineteen per cent of the pie, but right then she motioned to the young man at the bar. Norton’s ears started humming and he didn’t catch the boy’s name. He stood to hug Laura goodbye, and she left, without giving him any reassurance that he would ever see her again. There were never any guarantees that those you supported would consent to see you. He hadn’t seen her mother since the divorce. A nanny—usually a college girl—had delivered Laura for vacations.

Now alone, Norton looked down and felt mildly pleased that he had barely touched his Martini. The ice had melted. He thought of an old swindler down the hall in prison, who, twice a day, early in the morning and late in the evening, had sung the standard “Can’t You Hear Me Calling, Caroline.” No one knew if there was a real Caroline in the swindler’s life, but everyone suspected that it was the man’s wife. In any event, hearing the song became the least pleasant part of the day for most of Norton’s fellow-inmates. A relatively meek car dealer from Flint—also in for tax evasion—had repeatedly announced that he was going to “cut that asshole’s throat.”

Out on the street, Norton strained to remember where he had parked his rental car. Before prison, these lapses would have been unthinkable. They were coming too early in life. He had turned fifty rather neatly at the turn of the millennium and now he had broken through into a place where he didn’t want to be—just like a drunk, in one of those subdivisions where all the houses look the same, battering down the door of the wrong house.

Norton’s hubris apropos of the I.R.S. had interrupted an arc of life that had been clearly defined since he’d taken Economics 101, as a freshman. Leaving the prison, on a flight from Detroit to Denver, he had awakened from a brief snooze with the distinct feeling that the plane had stopped for a few moments in midair. No one else in the cabin appeared to have noticed it, but he was quite sure that it had happened.

He stopped and did a casual three-

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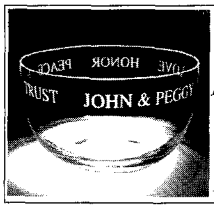

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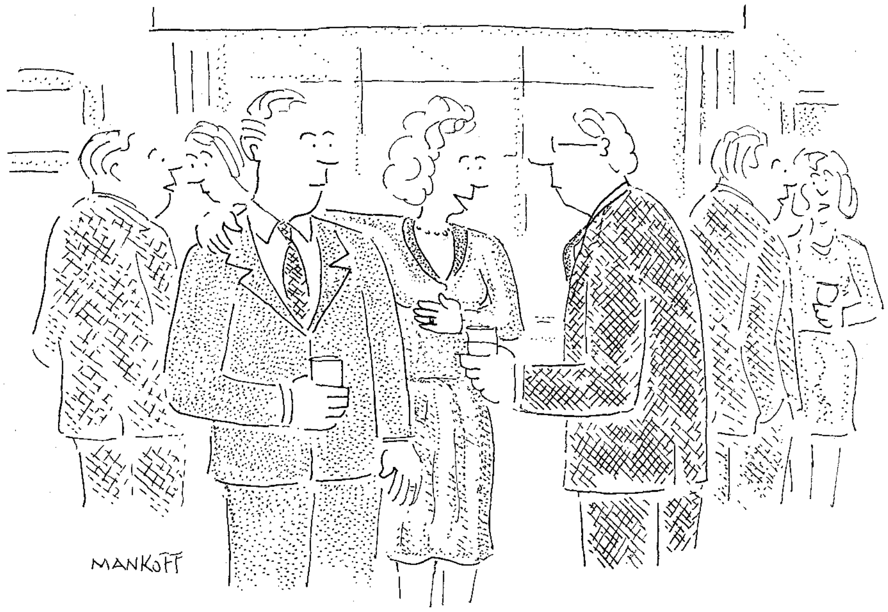

"We believe in same-sex marriage so strongly that he's having an operation."

sixty in front of a small lingerie shop where everything in the window was a ghastly shade of blue, the color of veins beneath skin. Now he remembered that he had left the car with the valet at the hotel across the square, in case Laura wanted to have dinner and he decided to stay the night.

Safely in his car, he was confronted with the question that every human experiences at some time or other: What do I do next? He could drive to the airport, of course, but that didn't seem good enough. It was a pleasant afternoon in May, and what was there to prevent him from driving all the way to Wisconsin to see his old mother (except that she couldn't stop calling him "Mr. Big Shot")? It wasn't exactly fun to sit in downtown Colorado Springs wishing that you had brothers and sisters or that your wife had consented to have more than one child. He could drive north to Montana, turn in the car in Billings, then buy a used pickup to help conceal his identity. Over the past two weeks in Reed Point he had blown his double-wide cover with two different women. One had been a waitress from a fancy restaurant in Denver, who'd whistled when he served her a bottle of fine French wine; the other had quizzed him about his handmade English shoes. He would have to try much harder to bury his past.

As he drove out of town, he tried to feel like an ex-con, a desperado ready to carve out a new life in the unfashionable wilds of Montana, but instead he kept thinking of crooked politicians who, when their misdeeds are revealed, decide "to seek opportunities in the private sector." Like many of the major crimes of our era, his had been a matter of uncolorful numbers, on which it was difficult to base a fantasy. His boyhood ambitions had been either to be a long-haul trucker with a willing waitress in every state or to own a gas station, like Percy Conrad did, with an old-time grease rack that moved up and down with a throaty hiss. When Percy wanted to go fishing, he simply hung a card that said "Gone Fishing" from a string on the knob on the front door. Any boy could see that this was a great life. One thing Norton knew for sure was how to avoid the life style of his ex-partner, Charlie, who had cashed out at just the right time in the nineties and bought a large farm in southern Illinois, where he raised and hunted pheasants, which he overfed to make them slow flyers. When tired of shooting lumbering birds, Charlie would fish in a hugely expensive pond that he had dug and filled with bass and bluegills. Norton searched his mind for the punch line of the joke about life being short but very wide. He could do anything he wanted in life, it seemed, except have dinner with his daughter.

By the time he hit the noxious traffic of Denver, he had become contemptuous of his own muddiness. There was nothing like family to throw you off-kilter. His parents had been bitterly disappointed at his divorce. His mother had told him that she was ashamed of him, and his father, suspecting infidelity as a cause, had droned, "Son, it's better to climb the same mountain a hundred times than a hundred different mountains." This kind of otiose country wisdom had always baffled him, and he thought of dreary church potluck suppers, where the strident problems of the outside world were dismissed with a chuckle.

He was well past Fort Collins and on the outskirts of Cheyenne when he began to feel teary. A dozen legal procedures, plus the sentence itself, had dug a three-year hole in his life—oddly, the same amount of time it had taken for his divorce to come through. It had been at least that long, he realized, since Laura had been, in any respect, her daddy's little girl. After her high-school graduation he had wanted to buy her a BMW. Instead, she had chosen a Subaru.

It was no easy thing to imagine a new life just because the previous one had lost its savor. Norton recalled with irritation how, when he was back in high school, an inspirational speaker, a flashy woman from Chicago, had told his class, "You northern kids fly too close to the ground." Right now he wasn't sure if he was landing or taking off. He was simply trying to proceed with grace. ♦

YOU CAN'T PLEASE EVERYBODY DEPT.

From the Associated Press.

Poincaré made strides in understanding three-dimensional spaces—the kind, for instance, that an airplane flies through, made up of north-south, east-west and up-down measurements. His question, or conjecture, was whether two-dimensional calculations could be easily modified to answer similar questions about 3-D spaces. He was pretty sure the answer was yes but could not prove it mathematically.

Answering the question may help scientists better understand the shape of the universe. Beyond that, it may have no application to everyday life.

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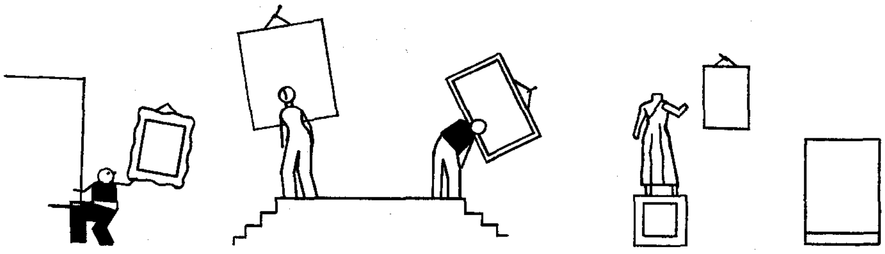


BOOKS

FOLK HERO

A new biography of Woody Guthrie.

BY DAVID HAJDU

The folksinger Arlo Guthrie likes to tell a story about his father, the legendary Woody Guthrie, who died in 1967, at the age of fifty-five. When he was a toddler, Arlo says, Guthrie gave him a Gibson acoustic guitar for his birthday. Several years later, when the boy was old enough to hold it, Guthrie sat him down in the back yard of their house—they lived in Howard Beach, Queens—and taught him all the words to "This Land Is Your Land," a song that most people likely think they know in full. The lyrics had been written in anger, as a response to Irving Berlin's "God Bless America," which Woody Guthrie deplored as treacle. In addition to the familiar stanzas ("As I went walking that ribbon of highway," and so on), Guthrie had composed a couple of others, including this:

> One bright sunny morning in the
> shadow of the steeple
> By the Relief Office I saw my people—
> As they stood hungry, I stood there
> wondering if
> God Blessed America for me.

"He wanted me to know what he originally wrote, so it wouldn't be forgotten," Arlo Guthrie has explained.

Like the defiant, vaguely socialistic original words to his best-known song, much of what Woody Guthrie was and did during his lifetime has been forgotten, supplanted by the stuff of nostalgic sentiment. "This Land Is Your Land," purged of its earthy contrarianism, shows up with "God Bless America" on albums of patriotic music and in concerts by pops orchestras that accompany the fireworks on the Fourth of July, and its author's face has been put on a United States postage stamp. Woody Guthrie, a contradictory man who vexed his family and his closest friends as much as he challenged the authorities—"I can't stand him when he's around," Pete Seeger, his friend and also a bandmate for a time, once said, "but I miss him when he's gone"—scarcely registers as a creature of human dimension. In the popular imagination, where he endures, more than half a century after his creative prime as a writer and singer, Guthrie seems more like Gypsy Davy, Rocky Mountain Slim, and other colorful folk heroes of the songs he sang. He functions as the embodiment of gritty American authenticity, the plainspoken voice of a romanticized heartland.

Guthrie was never really so authentic, as Ed Cray shows in "Ramblin' Man: The Life and Times of Woody Guthrie" (Norton; $29.95), a work of tempered debunking that is the first notable Guthrie biography since Joe Klein's "Woody Guthrie: A Life," which started unravelling the lore in 1980. The Klein book, fans of classic rock will recall, was the beneficiary of a sweet plug on Bruce Springsteen's 1986 boxed set of live recordings; in a halting, Okie-inflected voice, Springsteen complimented "this fella named Joe Klein," before moving into an acoustic-guitar version of "This Land Is Your Land." Springsteen was then in the process of molting his leather jacket and his urban ambitions to become a Guthrie-style troubadour of the mythic hinterland, a change that signified his maturation within the rock world.

John Steinbeck—"the Woody Guthrie of American authors," as he has been called—revered his musical compatriot in polemical realism. In his introduction to "Hard Hitting Songs for Hard-Hit People," a book of Depression-era folk tunes compiled by the folklorist and activist Alan Lomax, Steinbeck praised Guthrie's music for capturing "the American spirit," and noted, "He sings the songs of a people and I suspect that he is, in a way, that people."

Guthrie's people were in fact the upper-middle-class American élite. His father, Charley Guthrie, was a prosperous real-estate speculator and aspiring politician (a conservative Democrat and vehement anti-Communist) in Okemah, Oklahoma, a boomtown in the oil territory of the newly annexed state; at one time, he and his wife, Nora, owned as many as thirty rental properties, and they were the first people in town to purchase an automobile. Their third child, Woodrow Wilson Guthrie, was born on July 14, 1912, twelve days after that year's Democratic Presidential Convention, and named for the freshly nominated candidate. "Papa . . . swapped and traded, bought and sold, got bigger, spread out, and made more money," Woody Guthrie recalled accurately in his often fanciful memoir, "Bound for Glory." "We all liked the prettiest and best things in the store windows, and anything in the store was [ours] just for the signing."

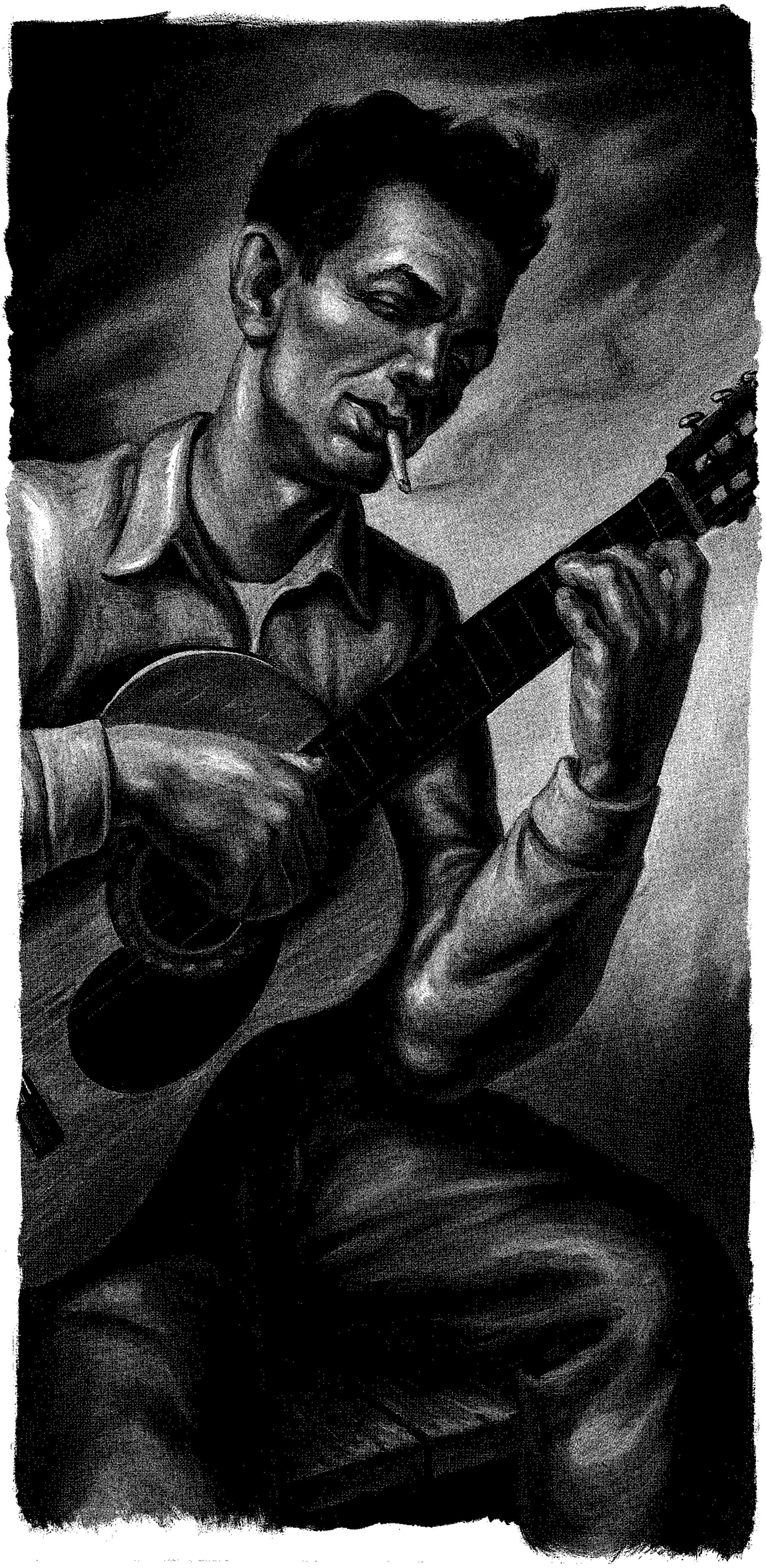
The hard times of the early nineteen-twenties devastated the Guthries, claiming the family's property and the children's buying privileges. Unpersuaded by his parents' faith in capitalism, Guthrie eventually fell sway to the socialist utopianism that was attracting the attention of intellectuals, the young, the poor, and other disillusioned or idealistic Americans during the late nineteen-twenties and early thirties. He was a convert to disenfranchisement and always advocated the underprivileged with a proselyte's zeal.

"Woody Guthrie," like "Bob Dylan" and "Springsteen," was essentially a self-invention made for the electronic media:

after a few years of scrounging, singing for change, and passing himself off as a seer and a faith healer, Guthrie made his name doing a comedic hillbilly act on Los Angeles radio in 1937. He had moved to the city in the mid-thirties, a time when outlandishly hokey cowboy singers were a novelty craze—a way for the music and movie industries simultaneously to exploit and ridicule rural culture for the pleasure of the urban audience. Cray describes a Los Angeles "awash in country-hillbilly-cowboy-western music," with radio stations broadcasting the likes of the Stuart Hamblen Gang, the Covered Wagon Jubilee, the Beverly Hillbillies, the Saddle Pals, the Bronco Busters, the Saddle Tramps, and the Sons of the Pioneers. Woody Guthrie rode the marketplace like a saddle-sore poke on a long-tailed dogie (or some such), crooning cowboy songs with his cousin Oklahoma (Jake Guthrie) and a cowgirl, Lefty Lou (his friend Maxine Crissman), playing the spoons, spinning tall tales, and reciting what he called his "cornpone philosophy" in a theatrical Okie drawl that he employed to disarming effect for the rest of his life.

Guthrie's inchoate socialist leanings grew into a deep commitment to the labor movement and to the social and political adventurism of the American Communist Party. (Guthrie never joined the Party—his independence was such that he "was not affiliated with anything," according to his sister Mary Jo; he did follow the Party line, however, down to belittling Roosevelt as a warmonger during the period of the German-Soviet nonaggression pact, and he wrote a column called "Woody Sez," in hillbilly dialect, for the C.P.U.S.A. organs *People's World* and *Daily Worker.*) The first of Guthrie's three wives, Mary, lamented his politicization as "his downfall as an entertainer," and she had a point: the more he focussed on rousing the masses, the less he pleased the crowd. Guthrie's modest popular following diminished; at the same time, through politics, he found his voice.

"I never did make up many songs about the cow trails or the moon skipping through the sky," Guthrie wrote in "Bound for Glory," "but at first it was funny songs of what's all wrong, and how it turned out good or bad. Then I got a


OWEN SMITH

Guthrie challenged the commercial aesthetic of the pre-rock era through a performance style that was almost combatively anti-musical.

little braver and made up songs telling what I thought was wrong and how to make it right, songs that said what everybody in the country was thinking."

In a letter to Alan Lomax quoted (with its creative grammar and spelling) by Klein, Guthrie expanded on this thought:

> A folk song is what's wrong and how to fix it, or it could be whose hungry and where their mouth is, or whose out of work and where the job is or whose broke and where the money is or whose carrying a gun and where the peace is—that's folk lore and folks made it up because they seen that the politicians couldn't find nothing to fix or nobody to feed or give a job of work.

Indeed, folk music has traditionally served as an outlet for native discontent, often expressed in coded language (the boll weevil stands in for field hands, the farmer's son is the government). Still, there is a great difference between the folk songs that circulated in Woody Guthrie's day and the music he wrote; that is, the very fact that he wrote it. Folk music (including country, blues, and other vernacular styles) was supposed to be anonymous—a collective art passed along orally from singer to singer, generation to generation, sometimes culture to culture. From the vantage point of today, when kids with their first guitars start writing songs before they learn to play other tunes, it is difficult to process how exceptional it was for a folk artist such as Woody Guthrie to have created a vast repertoire of deeply idiosyncratic works. (Many Tin Pan Alley, Broadway, and Hollywood songwriters of the thirties and earlier were as skilled and prolific as Guthrie, but they were working in a different vein, writing to order for professional singers.) Guthrie brought the authorial imperative to vernacular music in America.

Guthrie, like many American musicians, was immeasurably indebted to black music. In an unpublished manuscript quoted by Cray, he recalled that one of his earliest childhood memories was of hearing a "Negro minstrel jazzy band blowing and tooting and pounding drums up and down our street," a sound that inspired him to "sing out the first song I ever made up by my own self." At the age of thirteen, he discovered the blues; according to what Guthrie told Lomax in an interview for the Library of Congress (released on a three-CD set in 1989), he studied a "big ol' colored boy" shining shoes in front of a barbershop and singing what Guthrie found to be "undoubtedly the lonesomest music I ever run on to in my life." Each experience informs one of the two main categories of Guthrie's songs. His light tunes (many of them, such as "Car Song" and "Jiggy Jiggy Bum," written expressly for children) have a free, joyful, improvised feeling; his ballads of hard life have the impenitent rawness of Mississippi Delta blues, along with the blues' harmonic structure (three chords, tonic, subdominant, and dominant) and, in many cases, the blues' metre:

Down in Texas, my gal fainted in the rain
Down in Texas, my gal fainted in the rain
Had to throw a bucket of sand in her face
Just to bring her back again.

The Popular Front saw artistic refinement as a mark of bourgeois élitism, and so did Guthrie. "Woody believed in simplicity like people in the Bible Belt believe in their scripture," Guthrie's schoolmate Matt Jennings tells Cray. Guthrie seemed to think of musical complexity as corrupt, and he wrote most of his songs with just a few chords, in the key of G. (He would slide a capo up the neck of his guitar to change keys, much as his nemesis Irving Berlin, who could play only in F-sharp, used a special mechanism built into his piano to transpose his songs.) Guthrie's melodies, many of which were adapted from traditional sources, are as basic and memorable as schoolyard chants, and the words are just as biting. (The music to the opening phrase of "This Land Is Your Land" simply follows the first four notes of the major scale, making the tune a model exercise for beginning musicians.) His lyrics, similarly, seek to convey a guileless cleverness and intensity—a pridefully untrained intelligence. Grammar and syntax give way, rhymes miss, and accents fall awkwardly, all contributing to the songs' effect of unadorned veracity, as in "The Biggest Thing That Man Has Ever Done," one of Guthrie's many tunes about the Grand Coulee Dam:

I climb the rocky canyon where the
  Columbia River rolls,
Seen the salmon leaping the rapids and
  the falls.
The big Grand Coulee Dam in the
  State of Washington
Is just about the biggest thing that man
  has ever done.

Once Hitler ventured into the Soviet Union and Stalin joined forces with the Allied powers, Guthrie became patriotic; he supported the United States' involvement in the Second World War and pasted a hand-painted sign onto the front of his guitar: "This Machine Kills Fascists." He kept it there after the war, in reference to another target: the cultural power brokers who, in his view, oppressed folk artists by rewarding sleek professionalism. Guthrie, now living in New York, challenged the commercial aesthetic of the pre-rock era through a performance style that was not merely plaintive, like that of countless singing cowboys in the movies, but almost combatively anti-musical. In the dozens of recordings that he made between 1940 and 1952 (many of which have been reissued by Smithsonian Folkways in conscientiously engineered and annotated CDs), his singing and playing are jarring: his voice bone-gray, dry and stiff, and indifferent to pitch; his guitar work spare and ragged, and frequently out of tune. Aesthetically, Guthrie was less a socialist than an anarchist, contemptuous of the prevailing rules and standards.

For all his advocacy of the common man, Guthrie sought to be recognized as someone exceptional. Agnes (Sis) Cunningham, his sometime bandmate (along with Seeger, Bess Hawes, Millard Lampell, Lee Hays, and others) in the Almanac Singers, the leftist vocal group of the forties, told me a few years ago that Guthrie was "determined to become a legend in his own time." (Cray quotes Hawes as saying that Guthrie was "desperate" to become "a big, important person.") After all, he did not call his autobiography "Bound for Obscurity," and the book is dense with folksy anecdotes that dramatize his innate superiority to government officials, businesspeople, other authority figures, and most of his friends. "Bound for Glory" captures Guthrie vividly; he was fearsomely gifted and ambitious, and also egalitarian—a most uncommon man.

Woody Guthrie succeeded in be-

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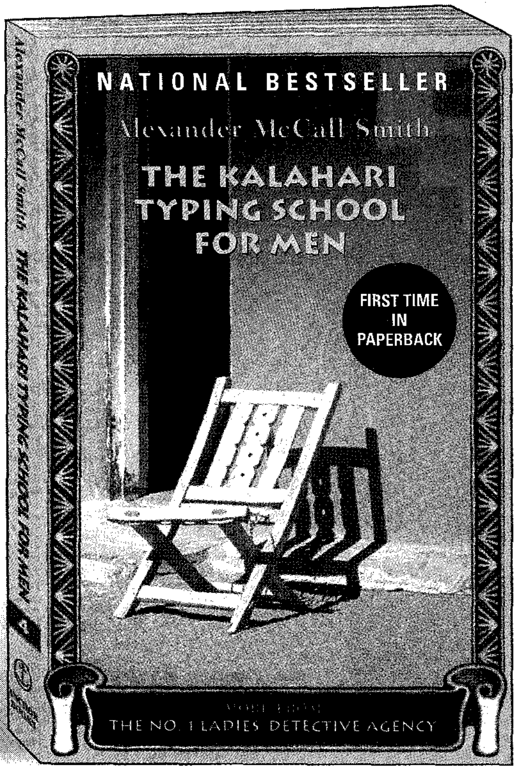

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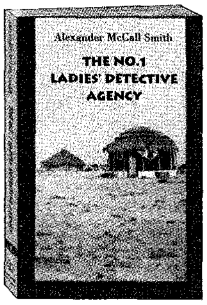

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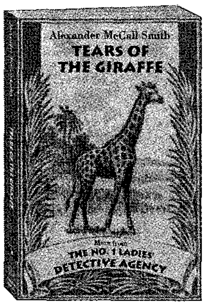

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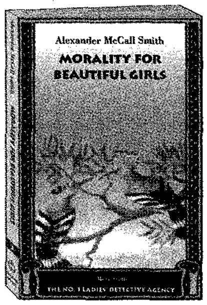

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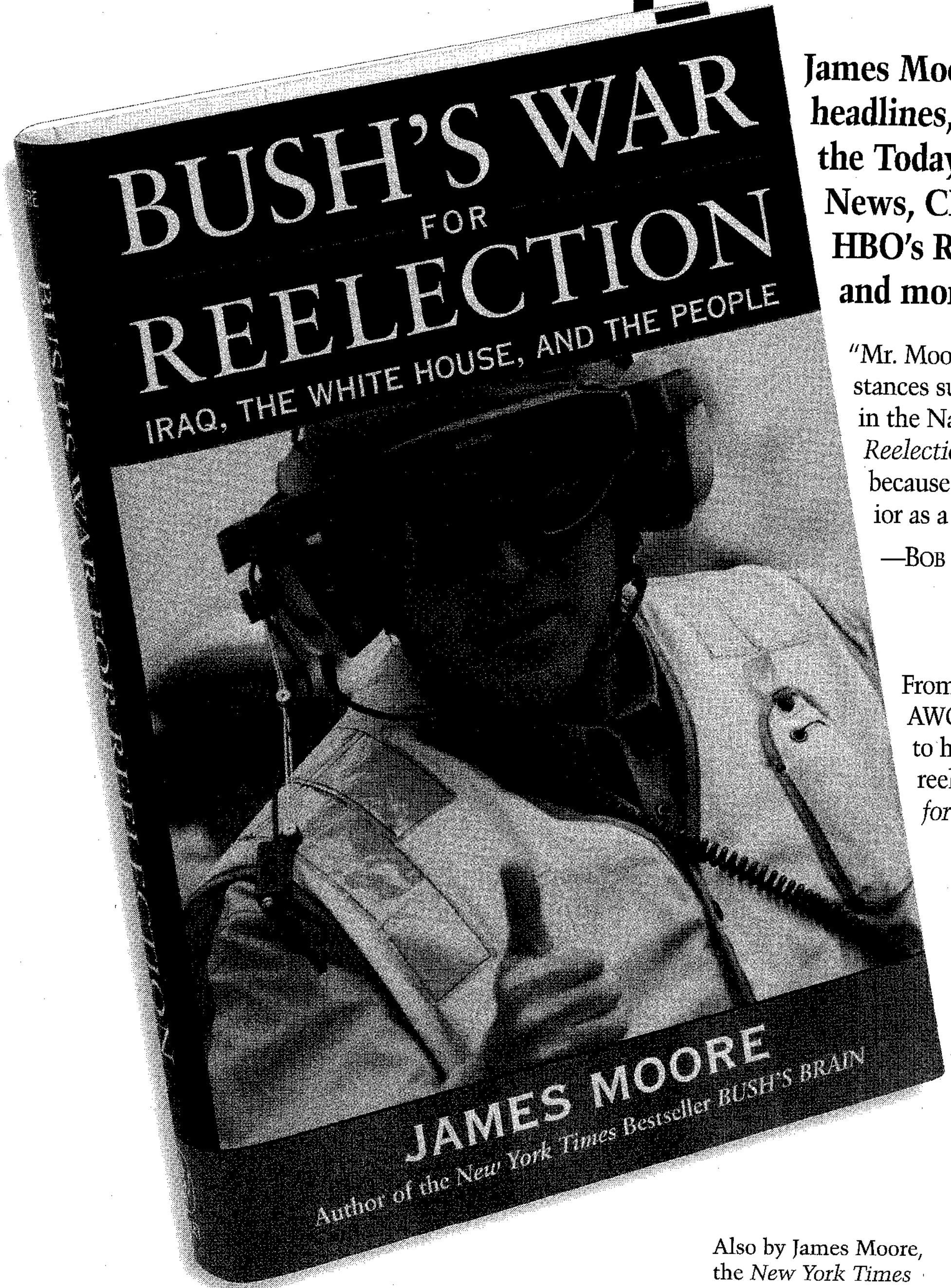
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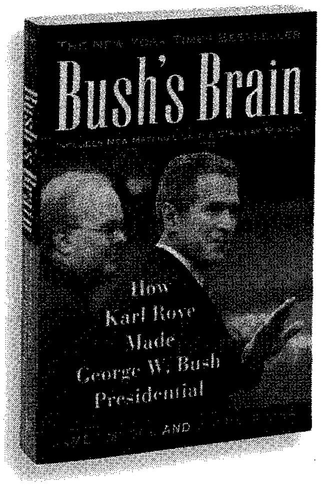
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coming a legend in the last years of his life, as young people of the postwar era, seeking their own cultural identity, veered away from the coolly sophisticated, urbane pop on their parents' hi-fis in favor of more idiomatic music grounded in rural America—folk, country, the blues, and their hybrid, rock and roll. Students by the thousands massed in Washington Square Park each week to strum along to "This Land Is Your Land," and to look for Woody Guthrie, the exemplar of the folkie ideal. He was unable to take active part in his newfound idolhood, however. Debilitated by Huntington's disease, a degenerative disorder of the nervous system, Guthrie became a tragic figure to his young acolytes: an American original cut down before his time, seemingly gone mad (wildly erratic behavior being a symptom of the disease)—a living amalgam of Hank Williams and Friedrich Nietzsche. When the nineteen-year-old Bob Dylan arrived in New York from Minnesota in January of 1961, he told his friends that he was going to meet his god, Woody. "He's the greatest holiest godliest one in the world," Dylan said of Guthrie around that time—a "genius genius genius genius."

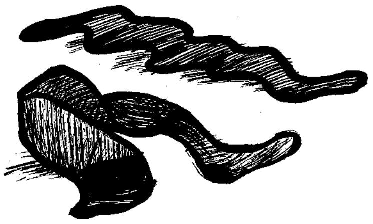
Reflecting on the period later, Dylan explained, "Woody turned me on romantically. . . . What drew me to [him] was that, hearing his voice, I could tell he was very lonesome, very alone, and very lost out in his time. That's why I dug him. Like a suicidal case or something. It was like an adolescent thing—when you need somebody to latch onto, you reach out and latch onto them."

With today's rock and pop feeling homogeneous, and with hip-hop now twenty years old, popular music is ripe for something new. Whatever comes will surely be something that challenges the complacency of the mainstream; something from disreputable sources; something critical of the status quo, harsh, simple, seemingly anti-musical, and doable without formal training—that is to say, something much in the vein of what Woody Guthrie did. If few nineteen-year-olds today think of latching onto Guthrie, his spirit may be closer than they know. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

Little Children, *by Tom Perrotta (St. Martin's; $24.95).* The eponymous children in this satirical novel are actually adults who, chafing at the burdens of parenthood, try to re-create their unencumbered youth. Sarah, an overeducated young homemaker, likens her tantrum-prone daughter to a "brooding Russian epileptic" out of Dostoevsky, and pines for lost college days of feminism and bisexuality. While her husband orders used panties online, she has furtive sex with a stay-at-home dad whose repeated failure to pass the bar has earned him the contempt of his gorgeous wife. The humor is sometimes cruel, but Perrotta never betrays the complexity of his characters. For all Sarah's sins—neglecting her child, wallowing in romantic delusions—there's something almost brave about her refusal to join the supermoms drilling their toddlers with dreams of Harvard, and about her yearning for more than "a painfully ordinary life."

The Birth of Venus, *by Sarah Dunant (Random House; $21.95).* Lorenzo de' Medici has just died, Savonarola is busy consigning Florence to the flames, and Alessandra Cecchi, a plain, headstrong girl from a prosperous Florentine family, is about to be married off to a much older suitor (who secretly plans to use her to hide his passion for her brother). Alessandra, who loves to draw, is besotted with the young painter who has been hired to decorate the family chapel. Part feverish thriller, part historical romance, the story of the outspoken heroine's sentimental education—a comprehensive curriculum including every conceivable transgression—sometimes comes off as a heady blend of Browning's "My Last Duchess" and Anaïs Nin. But Dunant's skill lies in combining these elements with a finely textured and pertinent depiction of a cultured citizenry in the grip of rampant fundamentalism.



Shostakovich and Stalin, *by Solomon Volkov, translated from the Russian by Antonina W. Bouis (Knopf; $30).* After hearing Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony, an envious Boris Pasternak wrote, "He went and said everything, and no one did anything to him for it." The extent of the composer's complicity or dissidence under Stalin has been much debated. Volkov, a prominent adherent of the latter view, marvels at this timid man's ability to express suffering in music that was nonetheless outwardly optimistic, and suggests that Shostakovich found an important model in Pushkin, who survived the cruelties of Tsar Nicholas I by juggling three classically Russian roles—"pretender," "chronicler," and "holy fool." Volkov's story depends too often on hunches and assumptions, but he is illuminating when he places the composer in the context of other artists (Pasternak, Bulgakov, and Mandelstam) who attempted dialogue with Stalin and were alternately supported and persecuted by him.

Washington's Crossing, *by David Hackett Fischer (Oxford; $35).* On December 22, 1776, Washington's adjutant wrote him that their affairs "were hasting fast to ruin." Two weeks later, after a harrowing nighttime crossing of the ice-choked Delaware River, Washington's victories at Trenton and Princeton so shocked the British that the price of government securities fell. Fischer's thoughtful account describes how Washington, in a frantic, desperate month, turned his collection of troops into a professional force, not by emulating the Europeans but by coming up with a model that was distinctly American. The army Washington fielded had innovative artillery, moved with startling speed, and even, in one of the first recorded instances, synchronized its watches. Trenton convinced many Britons that they were caught in a quagmire, and Americans that they could win. "A few days ago they had given up the cause for lost," a British businessman wrote. "Now they are all liberty mad again."

POP MUSIC

SLOW BURN

Norah Jones's eternal afternoon.

BY SASHA FRERE-JONES

Norah Jones is apparently very boring. Recent reviews of her new album, "Feels Like Home," use words like "tepid," "blank," and "dull" to describe her music. She has been referred to more than once as Snorah Jones. But there are at least twenty million people who have a different take. Her 2002 début album, "Come Away with Me," which sold eight million copies in America and ten million overseas, and won a number of Grammys, is the flag waved by record executives every time another article about the end of the music business appears. Like many mega-platinum records, "Come Away" succeeded without the benefit of much critical support, and "Feels Like Home" has sold two million copies in the first month of its release. How her records do what they do is a topic that is annexing its own wing of journalism. Some credit marketing, but record companies regularly promote releases by sending out advance copies to critics, buying ads, licensing songs to Starbucks compilations, and the like. It's what record companies know how to do. Yet the records they push rarely sell eight million copies. Eight million means there are no red states or blue states. Eight million means everyone voted for you.

There are sociological explanations. Critics point out, accurately, that young artists like Jones, who is twenty-five, and Josh Groban and Michael Bublé are selling soothing songs by the seashore to a much older audience. These artists' faith in melody and acoustic instruments ostensibly provides evidence that not all musicians below the age of thirty are getting tattooed with runic symbols and sending viruses to each other on tiny, inscrutable batphones. Record companies have agreed to think that the older audience is their pot of gold. This is half science—the percentage of records being bought by listeners above the age of thirty is growing—and half hearsay. Older listeners are continually saddled with the calumny that they are too dumb or scared to download music for free.

There is the aesthetic explanation—Norah Jones and her foot soldiers are organic, grass-fed artists taking back the castle from the injection-molded, polyblend popbots who are accused of a number of crimes against music. (These crimes are often what drew people to pop in the first place, but what are a few false dichotomies when you're mourning your youth?) Jones's sound is distinctive enough to have created its own subgenre, and new singers like Katie Melua, possibly against their wishes, are being sold as post-Norah artists. Jones has managed to make music that is universally useful, like a paper clip, but personal enough that listeners think they discovered it for themselves.

Norah Jones's music may be sweet and steady—and popular—but it's no lullaby.

ZOHAR LAZAR

There are two plausible explanations for all this smoke and fire: Norah Jones is actually pretty good. And she is selling the all-time No. 1 hit song—sex.

In many ways, Jones resembles the Nigerian-British pop singer Sade. When Sade débuted, in the eighties, she was given little critical attention. Her unusually fine physical beauty worked for and against her, as did her easygoing music, which didn't seem to fit anywhere exactly. Songs like "Your Love Is King," co-written with a band member, Stuart Matthewman, rode a groove that pushed the sexuality inherent in the fairly obvious metaphors. The saxophone added the aroma of jazz, but Sade's vocals rarely deviated from a restrained, breathy mood.

As with Sade, much of Jones's material is written with her longtime band members, often her boyfriend and bassist Lee Alexander. This means that the people writing the songs are inside the physical experience of the sound. Jones’s music, too, is a recombinant blend that could be racked in various parts of the store. The twang in Jones’s voice establishes a cosmetic link to country, while the upright bass and piano suggest jazz. Jones is sometimes classed with other female singer-songwriters, like Lucinda Williams, but this is also inaccurate. Jones has none of Williams’s emotional heft or her facility with words. Most important, Jones never ruffles feathers or breaks the skin.

That doesn’t mean skin is irrelevant—it is the whole point. Consider this line from guitarist Jesse Harris’s “I’ve Got to See You Again,” recorded on Jones’s first album: “To not touch your skin is not why I sing.” Sex is in the music, the look, and everywhere in between. Jones is beautiful in a way that reassures those threatened by Beyoncé’s American thighs or Britney’s global bodysuits. For such an alleged milquetoast, Jones’s breakout song, “Don’t Know Why,” is certainly suggestive: “I don’t know why I didn’t come / I left you by the house of fun.” The album’s lyrics continue in this vein, sounding like a transcription of phone calls during the first week of a romance: She’s got to see you again, she’s feeling the same way all over again, she can’t hide beneath her sheets, she’s waiting for you to come on home and turn her on. It may smell like sandalwood and your dad may give it to you for Christmas, but Jones’s music is one big booty call.

Jones’s aspirate voice dominates her albums modestly but firmly. This effect should be credited in part to Jay Newland, the engineer who recorded and mixed much of “Come Away with Me” and all of “Feels Like Home.” Jones has admitted that she isn’t a great live performer, and this has been independently confirmed by friends of mine who have fallen asleep at her shows. It makes sense. Jones does things at close range. She is an artist of the studio.

If “Come Away with Me” was fourteen first dates, “Feels Like Home” is moving in together. There are more topics and a few new sounds, but sex is still central. It just lasts longer this time. Listen to the first song on the album, co-written by Jones and Alexander: “Sunrise, sunrise, couldn’t tempt us if it tried / cuz the afternoon’s already come and gone.” (Jones’s work recalls the last true poets of daytime sex, the Starland Vocal Band, whose “Afternoon Delight” won the Best New Artist Grammy in 1976.)

Musical foreplay, like the real thing, is about balance and maintenance. This is both Jones’s strength and her weakness. Pop music can hurdle our expectations and pierce our defenses in a matter of seconds, rewiring our neurons before we have a chance to decide whether or not we liked them just the way they were. Pop doesn’t wait. But Norah does wait, patiently, for our consent. Even for those addicted to pop music’s disruptive jolt, this can be kinda nice.

Marriage shows up on “Feels Like Home” as an unexpectedly bleak option. “Humble Me,” written by guitarist Kevin Breit, isn’t a patch on Lucinda Williams’s mighty “Side of the Road,” but it does use the same metaphor of the road as an emotional DMZ. There’s a baby in the back seat and a missing parent; something is not right. Jones begs, quietly, always quietly, for redemption: “Please, please, please forgive me.” It’s a lovely song, but not nearly as grim as it wants to be. This urge to soothe runs throughout “Feels Like Home.” When covering songs by Townes Van Zandt and Tom Waits, two implacably dark songwriters, Jones manages to leach the threat and decay from their work.

This isn’t quite the strike against art that some might argue. Covers are *supposed* to change the original artist’s intentions, and, in her nonconfrontational way, Jones is as committed to her stance as AC/DC or Frank Sinatra are to theirs. To that end, she puts words to Ellington’s “Melancholia”—not the move of a meek or diffident artist. The lyrics are fairly banal, but there’s a tidy reversal in the first verse: “As I sit and watch the snow / fallin’ down / I don’t miss you at all / I hear children playin’ laughin’ so loud / I don’t think of your smile.” To not think of smiles is not very Norah, but Jones probably knows that if she does break down at the side of the road, the darkness won’t be hugged away. ♦

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"Frozen" and "Embedded."

BY HILTON ALS

There is probably no greater horror than that of a child being abducted from his mother and having his barely formed life cut short. And there is probably no actress with greater skill at conveying wounded gentility and moral confusion than Swoosie Kurtz. As Nancy in Bryony Lavery's extremely well-crafted play "Frozen" (at the M.C.C.), Kurtz plays a mother who walks about in a stunned silence brought on by the kidnapping and murder of her little girl by a pedophile named Ralph (the brilliant Brían F. O'Byrne).

It makes no difference that Nancy's daughter was killed twenty years before the action of the play: Nancy is defined by mourning. She is—as the title of the play suggests—frozen by grief. And if to add color to the gray absence at the center of her life she chatters endlessly about the mundane—cocktail parties and the like—so be it. She likes the sound of her own voice; it's like the radio, distracting her from the sound of her daughter's cries, which echo in her imagination, like the sorrow songs.

Set in present-day England, "Frozen" is essentially a series of monologues describing the locked-in lives of three characters. In addition to Nancy and Ralph—who, at the time of the play, has been arrested for a new spate of child-abuse crimes—we have Agnetha (Laila Robins), a slightly younger than middle-aged criminologist who has travelled from the United States to deliver a group of lectures on the physical and emotional characteristics of the criminal mind. Although Agnetha is giving the lectures on her own, her work is a joint effort between her and her late lover, David. When, during the lectures, Agnetha wants to make a point that belongs to David, she rolls tape, and we hear his deep, sonorous voice. It's measured, steady, authoritative—a dream lover's voice. For Agnetha, it is the saddest of lullabies; her eyes fill with tears, as her body, which can't distinguish between public presentation and private pain, remains rigid.

Agnetha is just as paralyzed as Nancy, but, because she is a scientist, she must feign disinterest at all times, especially when she meets and interviews Ralph. As she sits in Ralph's cell, measuring his cranium and describing the criminal personality to the audience—instructing, she attempts to retain some measure of control—we can see her grief begin to seep through. Like the love and the despair that Agnetha will forever try to keep at bay, Ralph and his murky, cruel inner workings remain at a mysterious distance.

Agnetha tries hard to keep it together (and her demeanor can be annoying), but there's a braveness, a vulnerable pluck to her character, especially as it is played by Robins. Her thin frame cuts across the nearly bare stage; she has a deadpan focus and a passion for acting, but she's no showoff. While she is entirely convincing during her various monologues, you can tell that she prefers the relatively brief exchanges that take place when her character interviews Nancy about the crime and when she examines Ralph.

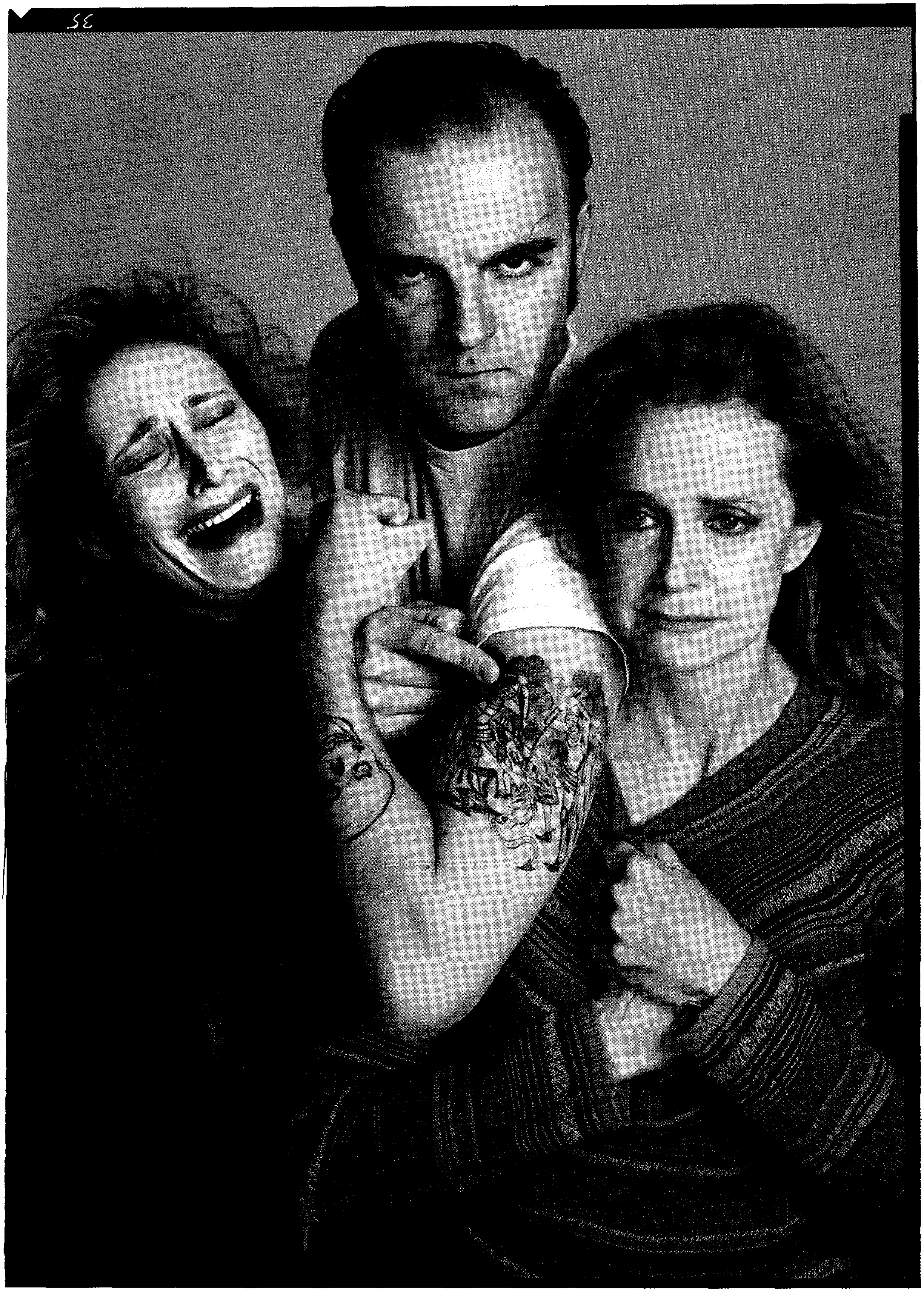
Ralph's repetition compulsion—to sexualize little girls and then silence his guilt about his fetish by dispensing of the victims—is the gravitas that makes the play deeper, and more troubling, than the first act leads you to expect. Lavery does little to explain Ralph's compulsion, except to have him reveal, during one of his unbearably intense monologues, that his father beat him when he was a child. Killing is a supreme act of revenge. By murdering Nancy's daughter, and others like her, Ralph, we glean, is killing the boy he was. This means everything and nothing. We may know the facts, but not the heart bent by and propelled toward destruction. Toward the play's close, when Nancy visits Ralph in jail to say that she at last forgives him, Ralph apologizes, but the sentiment is so far removed from his soul—what there is of it—that it's like watching a blind person trying to read the subtlest of expressions.

It's a great scene because of what Kurtz and O'Byrne do with it. Kurtz has always had one of those faces that belong to another era—that of the silent screen. She's aware (as Lillian Gish was) of what to do with her large eyes and her sweetheart of a mouth. She can say nothing and speak volumes by shifting slightly in her seat (her body is small and strong, like an osprey's). O'Byrne, on the other hand, is all physicality, alternately timid and intimidating, with slicked-back hair exposing a flat white forehead, and his tight, lithe frame encased in a snug wife-beater. The fusillade of words he unleashes barely express his damage, to say nothing of his pathetic attempts at damage control. You get the feeling that if you extended your hand to comfort him he'd gnaw it off, and still not satisfy his bloodlust. You get the feeling, too, that the three characters in "Frozen" are people who have always been attuned to tragedy—that tragedy seems to answer something in each of them. Which is not to say that Nancy wanted her daughter to be taken from her, but that her struggle has always been to find a balance between melancholy and order. The play's crimes come to seem like foregone conclusions, but before that possibility can be further expanded the performance ends, leaving us to our thoughts, and to the Pandora's box that Lavery has opened.

Tim Robbins, the writer and director behind "Embedded" (at the Public), is the spiritual and intellectual progeny of Klaus and Erika Mann, the vibrant and adventuresome children born

PHOTOGRAPH BY RICHARD AVEDON

Laila Robins, Brían F. O'Byrne, and Swoosie Kurtz, New York City, March 15, 2004.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to the great novelist Thomas. As virulent anti-Fascists, the Manns established Peppermill, a cabaret of actors, writers, and directors, whose work allegorized the rise of Nazism in the nineteen-thirties. Clever and urbane, Klaus and Erika had more than a streak of Weimar decadence.

Robbins is an intellectual sentimentalist—an actor and director whose political preoccupations are always sympathetic but do not necessarily add up to art. He has long had an interest in artists working together (his 1999 film, "Cradle Will Rock," explored Orson Welles's infamous staging of Marc Blitzstein's pro-union musical), but his earnestness can be a bit daunting. "Embedded" is a series of sketches about young men and women who have been sent off to Iraq, and the political machinations that got them there. Robbins employs masks, costumes, video projections, and music to get his point across—"Let's Have a War," by the hard-core band Fear, plays at the end of the first scene—but by the time the ninety-minute piece is over you feel as if an axe dipped in political correctness had been wedged into the back of your neck. Robbins has a big heart—and a sharp mind—which would be better utilized in work that did not necessarily speak his vision so directly. He'd be a smart choice to direct Ibsen's "An Enemy of the People," let's say: it's a text that addresses his concerns (the rights of the individual against a conformist society) and would discipline his overweening sweetness. ♦

DEPARTMENT OF UTTER CONFUSION

From the Key Reporter, a newsletter of the Phi Beta Kappa Society.

Librarians, archivists, and others who save *The Key Reporter* will note that starting with this issue—Number 1—the newsletter is numbered in accordance with the January-December calendar cycle. The first issue in a sequence of four will be published in January. The previous sequence followed the academic calendar, with the Number 1 issue appearing in the fall.

The Fall 2003 edition was wrongly identified as Number 3; it was Number 4. In past years the Summer issue was published in July and the Fall issue in November. In order to report promptly on the 40th Triennial Council last August, there was no Summer edition, and the Fall *Key Reporter* was mailed in September.

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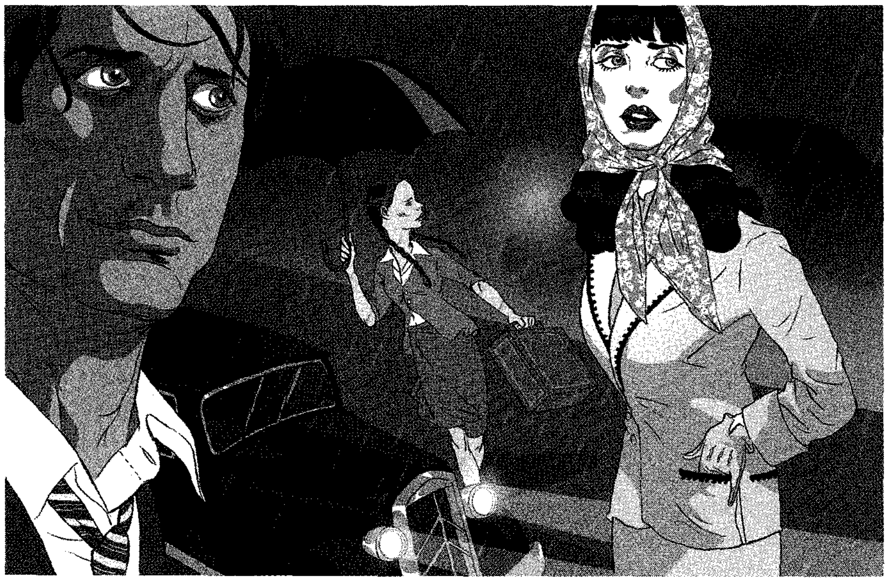
THE CURRENT CINEMA

THE QUICK AND THE DEAD

"Bon Voyage" and "Dogville."

BY DAVID DENBY



TOMER HANUKA

Grégori Derangère, Virginie Ledoyen, and Isabelle Adjani in wartime Bordeaux.

A train chugs into a station, and the audience screams in terror and ducks under the seats. It is 1895, everyone's favorite moment in film history—the time of naïveté when the cinema was born. The audience that turned up for the Lumière brothers' pioneering exhibition, in Paris, was not yet comfortable with the idea of illusion. The image onscreen was not just a picture of something real; it was reality itself. That idea hasn't quite faded: to some degree, many of us still believe that the cinema has a scandalously intimate connection with life. After all, movies are a photographic medium in which figures tread across the screen in what appears to be real time; the dominating impression that *this is real* is a large part of the primitive power of the art form. If the notion weren't still alive, the culturally advanced wouldn't be at such pains to assert the contrary—that the cinema is always some form of illusion, that "realism" is itself no more than a single style among many. One of the startling things about the response to Mel Gibson's "The Passion of the Christ" is the way the movie burns through this kind of sophistication and reaffirms, for better and for worse, the primordial sway of the image: the people who love the movie, bound by belief, give themselves over to the ecstasy of the real. There it is onscreen: every blow, every step up to Golgotha, right there in front of us. *It happened.* "The Passion," I think, is junk, but at least it's not trivial, cynical junk in the usual style of postmodernist pop—the gleeful rooting around in the scrap heap of discarded illusion, Kill Bill-ism for nonbelievers. No, "The Passion" is medievalist junk, a literal, blood-and-bone rendering of agony and death, and, for the audience coming to it with the right emotional wiring, seeing is believing.

The award-winning popular French film "Bon Voyage" also partakes of the power of the real, though it plays as farce from beginning to end. The setting is the city of Bordeaux in June, 1940. What's left of the government and the Parisian haut monde has fled south in order to escape the Germans. As anxious people mill about in the street and in the lobby of the deluxe Hotel Splendide, the movie becomes a frenzied fashion show of elegant black Citroëns and rakishly conservative double-breasted suits and plush silk cov-

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erlets. The movie star Viviane (Isabelle Adjani) is the hub of the wheel, a faithless femme fatale with thick black tresses and eyelashes that brush the vanity of three different men, all slavishly in love with her: the sappy hero, Frédéric (Grégori Derangère), a carefree young writer who has been Viviane's backstairs lover for years; the suave government minister Beaufort (Gérard Depardieu), who can hardly wait to collaborate with the Germans; and Winckler (Peter Coyote), an English journalist who is spying for the enemy. As Viviane runs from one man to another, making the best deal for herself at any given moment, an elderly Jewish nuclear physicist, propped up by his noble-browed young assistant (Virginie Ledoyen), tries to leave the country with valuable secrets before the Germans get hold of him. Watching "Bon Voyage," one may be reminded of "Casablanca" and other glamorous Hollywood wartime melodramas in which political intrigue flows through brief love affairs and grubby black-market deals. Those older movies were strenuously earnest and moist; this one is consciously exaggerated—a quarrel over Viviane's favors in the hotel restaurant turns into a window-smashing imbroglio. Yet the period details anchor the fun. The actors can teeter around corners like the frantic pursuers in a silent film precisely because they are secure in the knowledge that the authentic streets, cars, and suits will keep them from flying off their feet. For the audience, the sense that *this is real* licenses and liberates the comedy.

The director, Jean-Paul Rappeneau ("Cyrano de Bergerac"), early in his career made a wartime film called "A Matter of Resistance" (1966); the writer, Patrick Modiano, worked with Louis Malle thirty years ago on the great moral and psychological drama of the Occupation "Lacombe, Lucien." For them, the ethical issues of the war have long been settled, and the characters, both craven and heroic, can now be relished as fools—the betrayers forgiven as all too human, the heroes nostalgically caressed for their youth and recklessness. The formula animating the comedy in "Bon Voyage" is that nearly all these people are preoccupied with money and sex at a time when the apocalypse is about to swallow them up. Rappeneau keeps the momentum going: the scenes play faster than life, yet nothing is scrambled or thrown away, and after a while one accepts farce as the natural style of wartime panic. These actors, nourished by a theatrical tradition stretching back to the fifteenth century, know how to play farce (exaggerate everything, but not too much). The young star Grégori Derangère is tall and slender and has a slightly pop-eyed, stiff-necked look that reminds one of Cary Grant's alarm at finding something wilder than he expected going on. The great Depardieu, after years of playing surly peasants and sexy working-class louts, amuses himself with the cheerful, busily self-sufficient ministerial scoundrel—he may have found a new comic vein for himself late in his career. "Bon Voyage" is no more than a shallow, style-mad entertainment, but it never flags or loses its balance, and, despite the theatricality of the staging and the acting, it's precisely the materiality of the cinema—the crowds on the street, the wooded road at night where the Nazis chase the French—that makes us devour it with pleasure.

At the beginning of Lars von Trier's "Dogville," we are looking down at what appears to be an enormous game board—a flat, charcoal-gray surface painted with skinny white lines. This diagrammed space, we are told, is a town in the Rocky Mountains, during the Depression. The outlines of houses are painted on the "street"; the word "dog" is written within a painted oval. "Dogville" is about as far from a realist ethos as you can get. Every element in this hundred-and-seventy-seven-minute movie says that cinema is pure artifice, a willed recording of what has been arbitrarily arranged for the camera. Mock-solemn titles appear on the screen ("Chapter Two, In which Grace follows Tom's plans and engages in physical labor"), and a resonantly English voice (it is John Hurt's) narrates the story in heavily ironic, neo-Henry Fielding tones. Not a breath of air or natural light passes across the set: we're in the dead zone of schematic abstraction and didactic moral fable. Grace (Nicole Kidman), an innocent in a fur collar, shows up pursued by gangsters and throws herself on the mercy of the town; Tom (Paul Bettany), a weak, genteelly moralizing writer, steps forward to help her. At first, Grace is dismissed by the townspeople, but she quickly makes herself useful, then invaluable, by doing small tasks for everyone; then, abruptly, the town turns on her and brutalizes her.

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As Tom stands by passively, rusty iron shackles are placed on Grace's neck, and she is made to drag a heavy iron wheel everywhere she goes. Poor Grace has become the living receptacle of Dogville's venality and lust (the men take turns raping her). But at the end of the fable there's a twist. This female Jesus seeks revenge.

What Lars von Trier has achieved is avant-gardism for idiots. From beginning to end, "Dogville" is obtuse and dislikable, a whimsical joke wearing cement shoes. The material in this experimental work isn't terribly original: echoes of Thornton Wilder's "Our Town" bounce off the nonexistent set, along with traces of Shirley Jackson's story "The Lottery" and Friedrich Dürrenmatt's revenge drama "The Visit." Von Trier has assembled an extraordinary cast, including Patricia Clarkson and Stellan Skarsgård, but many of the line readings, issued into the vacuumy air of what sounds like a school play, come off as tentative or hapless. Did Lauren Bacall, cast as Ma Ginger, a surly keeper of gooseberry bushes, really say to the townspeople, "I'll hoe as I darn well please"? The language is neither theatrically alive nor colloquially tough. Like so many revolutionaries, von Trier can't wait to impose himself on free people: the entire population of the town changes its conduct toward Grace in unison. The movie is, of course, an attack on America—its innocence, its conformity, its savagery—though von Trier is interested not in the life of this country (he's never been here) but in the ways he can exploit European disdain for it.

"Some people think that I don't like women," the Danish director has said, "but obviously that's not true—it's men I have problems with." I'm sorry, but it's not "obvious" at all. After making three punitive fables in which women get mocked and abused ("Breaking the Waves" and "Dancer in the Dark" came earlier), von Trier appears to have chosen the moral universe in which he wants to live. He is selling a very old model of woman as victim—the waif-lamb-sweetie pie who, at this point, exasperates women as well as men—and he's so bizarrely out of it that his pitying condescension may be praised in some quarters as religious. No doubt it amuses him to put a major Hollywood star like Kidman in shackles, but what, exactly, is he punishing her for? He's the one mocking her innocence, not the pasteboard Americans onscreen. Von Trier treats Kidman as if she were a dumb whore, which may be more indicative of his true attitudes than anything he says. Kidman is quiet and touching, but, despite her sincere efforts, she will not drag the iron carcass of "Dogville" into success. Moviegoers will slide under their seats, just as they did a hundred years ago, though this time they will be screaming not from terror but from boredom. ♦

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Volume LXXX, No. 6, March 29, 2004. The New Yorker (ISSN 0028-792X) is published weekly (except for six combined issues: *February 16 & 23, April 19 & 26, June 14 & 21, July 12 & 19, August 9 & 16, and December 20 & 27)* by The Condé Nast Publications, which is a division of Advance Magazine Publishers Inc. PRINCIPAL OFFICE: The Condé Nast Building, 4 Times Square, New York, NY 10036. David Carey, vice-president and publisher; Chris Mitchell, associate publisher; Peter W. Jurew, associate publisher, marketing; Ronda Carnegie, advertising director; William Li, advertising director; Marie Wolpert, advertising director; Susan Harrington, director of creative services; Bob Gruters, director of marketing and strategic planning; Theresa Gaffney, creative development director; Rosemary Stanton, advertising business director. Advance Magazine Publishers Inc.: S. I. Newhouse, Jr., chairman; Steven T. Florio, vice-chairman; Charles H. Townsend, president and C.E.O.; John W. Bellando, executive vice-president and C.O.O.; Jill Bright, executive vice-president–human resources; John Buese, executive vice-president–chief information officer; David Orlin, senior vice-president–strategic sourcing; Robert Bennis, senior vice-president–real estate. Shared services provided by Advance Magazine Group: David B. Chemidlin, senior vice-president–general manager, shared services center. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices. Canada Post Publications Mail Agreement No. 40644503. Canadian Goods and Services Tax Registration No. R123242885. Canada Post return undeliverable Canadian addresses to: P.O. Box 1632, Station A, Windsor, ON N9A7C9.

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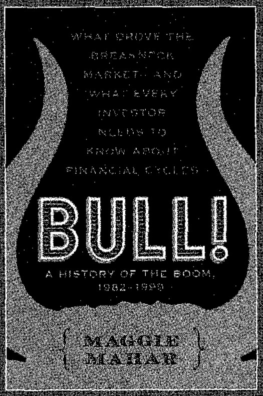
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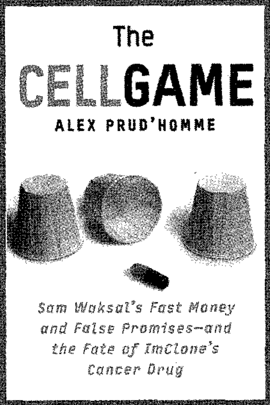
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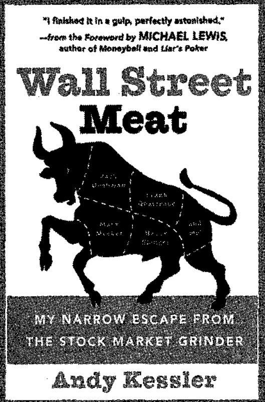
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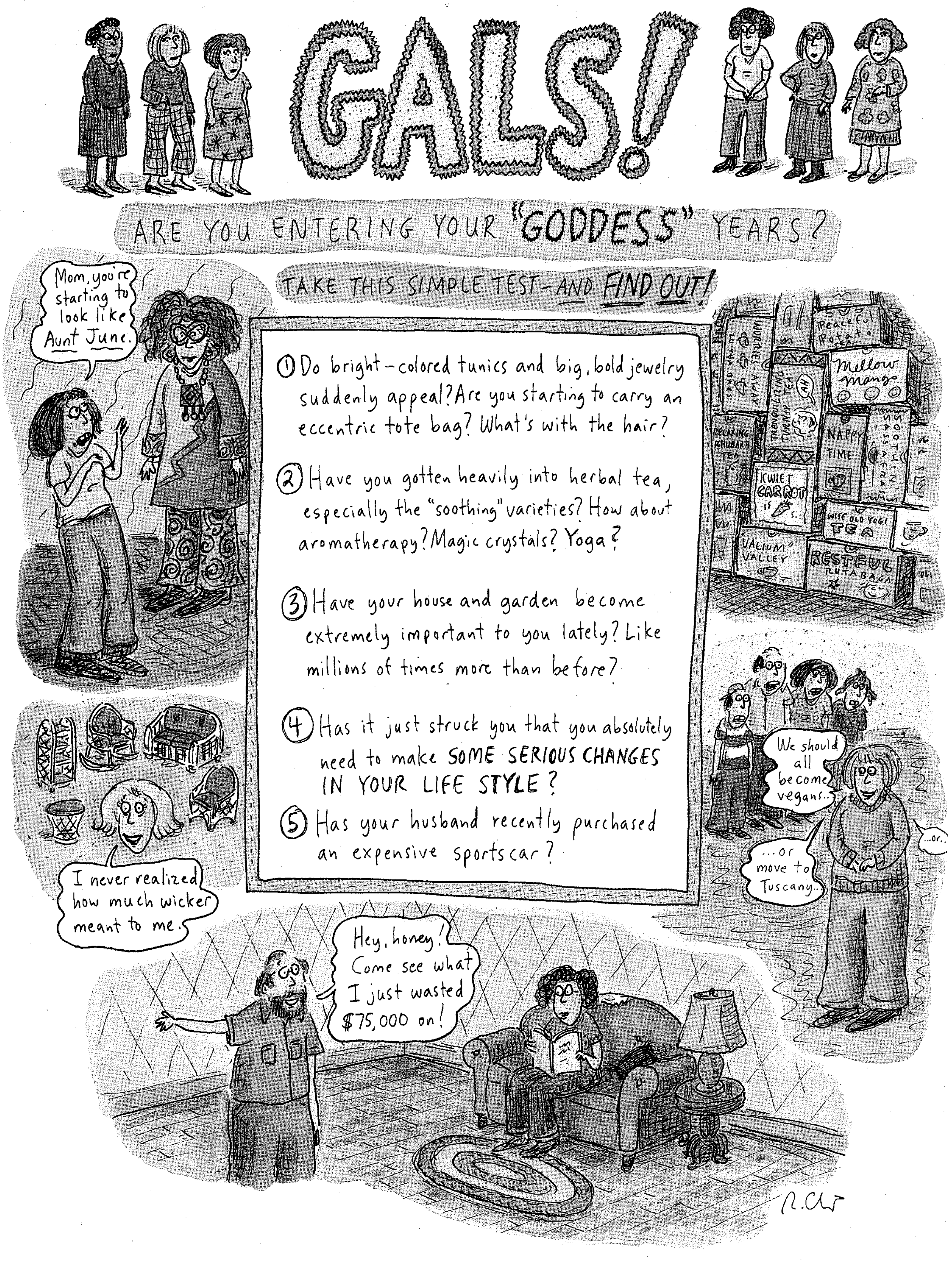
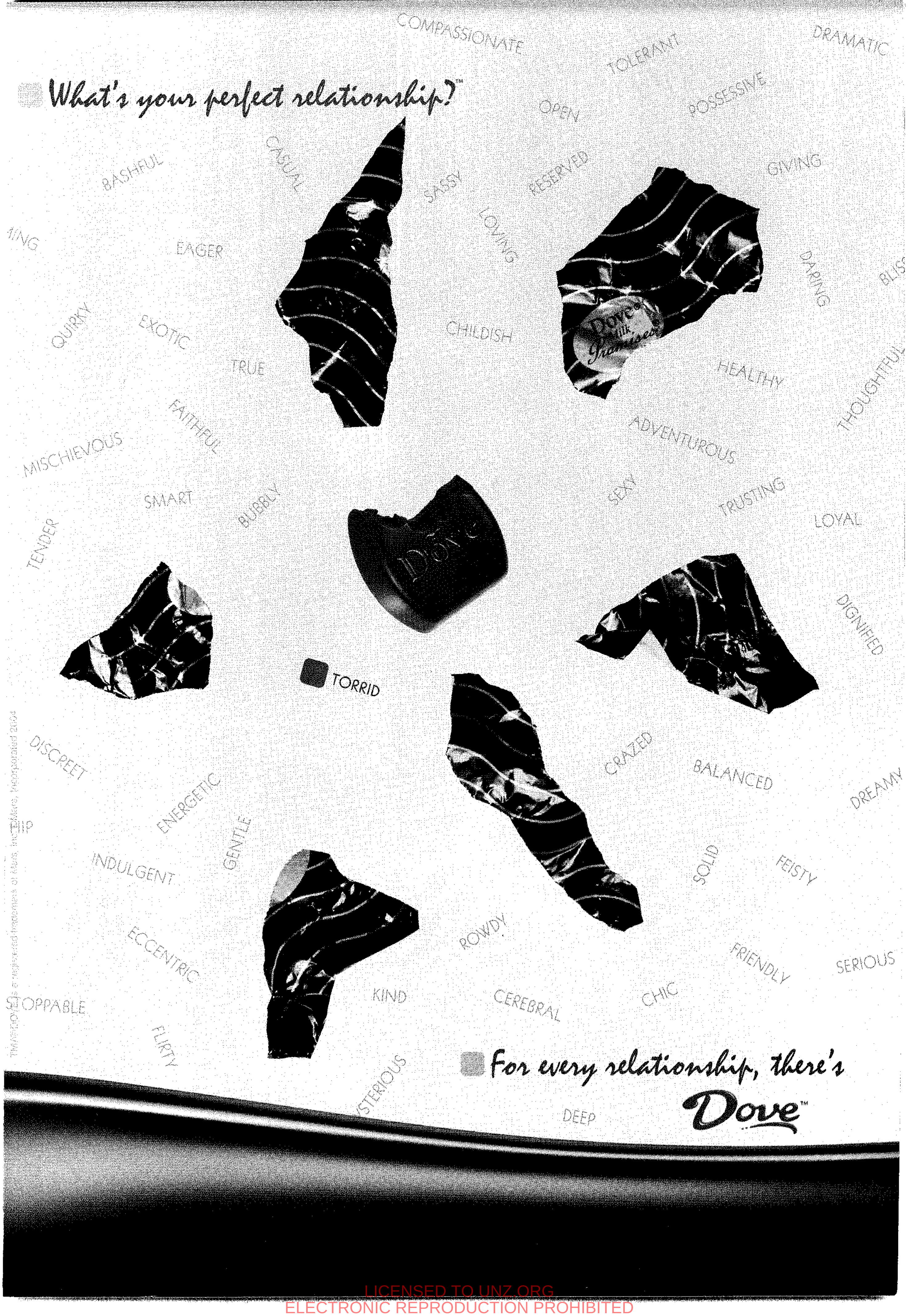

GALS!
ARE YOU ENTERING YOUR "GODDESS" YEARS?
TAKE THIS SIMPLE TEST–AND FIND OUT!
Mom, you're starting to look like Aunt June.
① Do bright-colored tunics and big, bold jewelry suddenly appeal? Are you starting to carry an eccentric tote bag? What's with the hair?
② Have you gotten heavily into herbal tea, especially the "soothing" varieties? How about aromatherapy? Magic crystals? Yoga?
③ Have your house and garden become extremely important to you lately? Like millions of times more than before?
④ Has it just struck you that you absolutely need to make SOME SERIOUS CHANGES IN YOUR LIFE STYLE?
⑤ Has your husband recently purchased an expensive sports car?
Worries-Away
20 tea bags
Peaceful Potato Tea
Mellow Mango
Tranquilizing Turnip Tea
AH
Relaxing Rhubarb Tea
Nappy Time
Soothing Sassafras
Kwiet Carrots
Wise Old Yogi Tea
"Valium" Valley
Restful Rutabaga
I never realized how much wicker meant to me.
We should all become vegans...
...or move to Tuscany...
...or...
Hey, honey! Come see what I just wasted $75,000 on!
R. Chast



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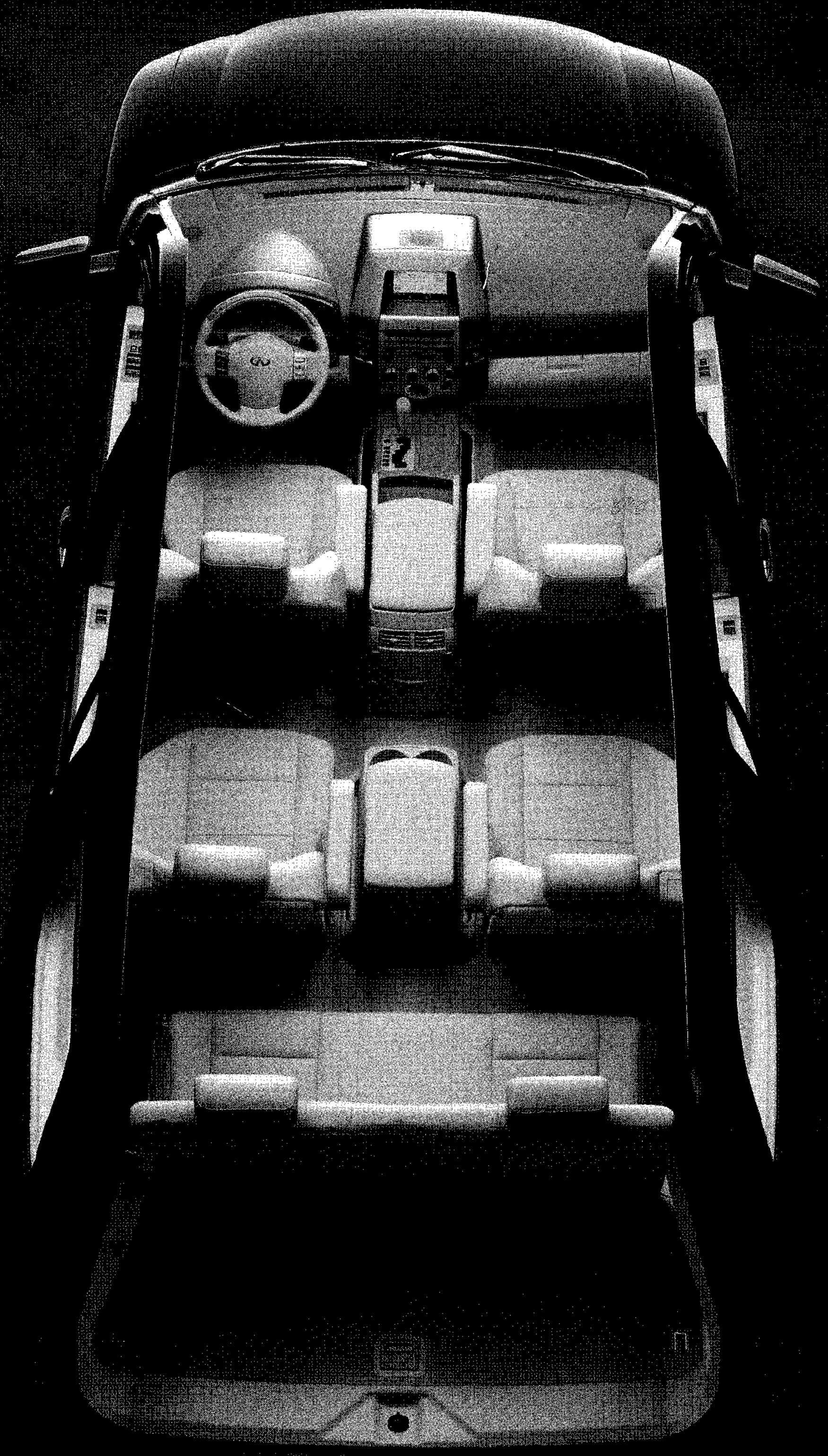

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